

Visual Poetry

An Anthology of Writings by Enrique Enriquez on
the Optical Language of the Tarot de Marseilles

Edited by D.M.

Dedicated to Saint Blaise, Patron Saint of Tarology



Per intercessionem S. Blasii liberet te Deus a malo gutteris et a quovis alio malo

"Tarology acknowledges two patron saints: Saint Blaise, healer of obstructed throats, whose name in French means 'to stutter' or 'to lisp'. 'Blaise' is also a homophone to the English word 'blaze', therefore standing for the thunderous clearing of obstructed language."

~ Enrique Enriquez, *Tarology*, p. 10

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ESSAYS

An Invitation to the Tarot

From time to time I like to do public, free, Tarot reading sessions. I do them at coffee shops, fashion stores, galleries or museums. It's a way of sharing what I love to do with those who aren't used to going to a cartomancer. It is also a way of helping others just because I can, and of course, a wonderful way of meeting interesting people and getting to know their stories.

In these sessions I have met many incredible characters, from Jackson Pollock's drinking pal to a porn princess, a professional thief, a shoeless singer, a woman convinced that a herd of ghostly pigs pursued her family, and an old writer looking for the ending of his novel. Among all these people, I particularly remember a man in his 30's, quiet, clean, with no rings, no tattoos, no feathers, no leather, no tie, no suitcase... no pin on his lapel saying 'Lose Weight, Ask Me How'... nothing. The kind of person whose face you forget a second after you meet him. This "average" man sat in front of me and voiced his question: "Will I ever see the Devil?"

You see? That's why I love people!

I started reassuring him, telling him that there wasn't any reason to fear such an encounter, but he stopped me on my tracks. "No, no... I WANT to finally meet him. I am tired of speaking with lesser demons. I want the Big Boss now! Tell me, will I ever see him?"

I was about to pass the cards to the man, when one card accidentally fell over the table. Do I really need to tell you which one it was? I looked at the card, then, slowly, looked at the man in the eye, and said: "There you have your answer".

The card on the table drew a broad smile on the "average" man's face. "Thanks! That's all what I wanted to know", he said, leaving my table happy as a kid.

Divination is the art of drawing an analogy between Chance and our personal situation. "Divinare" means, literally, "being one with the Divine". The function of any oracle is helping us to tap into our inner wisdom, it doesn't matter where we think that inner wisdom comes from. Divination isn't about forecasting the future, but about understanding our present situation in a way that will prepare us for any challenge we may face at creating the future we want for ourselves.

Not what that T.V. psychic told you, right?

Tarot is the analogical system par excellence. As soon as you look at a card, your mind establishes a parallelism between the image depicted in it, and certain feelings, aspects or details of your personal situation. The card tells you something in a flash. That's exactly what happened with my "average" friend. Before any word was spoken, he KNEW.

It is a paradox that even when divination is an analogical process, most divination systems are mnemonic in nature. Each element in them, and the pattern these elements form, are linked to a set of meanings that need to be committed by memory. There is no insightful "flash" unless you know by heart what all the possible combinations mean. This makes most divinatory systems dependent on a "specialist", the diviner, who interprets the oracle's message and delivers it, for you to make then the analogy between her words and your life. Tarot is an exception, an empowering one, and its particularity lies in it being capable of igniting that spark of intuition even if you have never had a previous contact with its imagery.

If you want to learn the best method to read Tarot, you only have to accept all that you already know:

Look at the cards in a relaxed state and speak your mind.

That's it.

Go along with your intuition, and try to understand how the cards are connected with the problem or concern you are experiencing in your life. This isn't as simple as it sounds, nor as difficult as some people may think, but everyone can do it. It's certainly not as boring as forcing yourself to learn prefixed meanings for each card. At first, your readings will surely be short; but as long as you keep looking at the cards and training yourself on how to fuel your intuition with your imagination, your readings will become deeper and more powerful. Tarot can make you a better person if you decide to understand it instead of memorizing it!

Besides, what are you going to memorize? Other people's opinions? There are thousand of books about Tarot. The best among these books invite us to think deeply, but even if they can teach us how to look at our own reflexions in the cards, Tarot itself remains a mystery.

Tarot is a wonderful work of art, buried under tons of pseudo-esoteric noise. No one knows who invented it, or why, nor even why it is called Tarot. The only thing we know for sure is that those first Tarot packs didn't come with a little white booklet full of prefixed meanings. No one can tell you which was the intended meaning for each card when they were created, and it doesn't matter. Tarot is a spiritual exercise, a set of magical drawings, not because of an occult tradition, but because every drawing is magical by itself. We create Tarot every time we look at it.

True observation requires effort, the kind of effort our culture hasn't trained us for. When we face a magazine or a newspaper, we prefer to read the caption rather than looking at the image. We accept what others say is happening in the pictures instead of looking for ourselves. But there are no captions in Tarot. So, force your imagination to wake up from the anesthesia, and look at the cards!

First, put all the cards in a row following its numerical order and look at the story they create. Starting with the Major Arcana only will be easier, and wiser, but don't dismiss the Minors! Just wait until you have more training to include them in the story. Tarot is like a car ride. The 22 Major arcana are the map. They will tell you where you are and where you are heading. The 56 Minor arcana are your control panel. They will help you check out your creative, intellectual, emotional and corporeal "equipment", all along the way.

Now, where are you in that story? How does that story relate to your life? Do this for several days and notice how the story changes over the time, getting richer and more diverse. If you feel depressed, the story will have a sad slant. If you are happy, the cards will offer you a joyful tale. Notice how the cards shapeshift in response to your emotions. After a few days mix the cards, rearrange them in a random order, and ask yourself the same questions ... Do this again, and again ... You will notice that the only way to really create a meaningful story is by not assigning a prefixed meaning to each card. Every time they will make sense in a different way. Use them in the way that fits best the story you see.

When you feel that you are comfortable creating stories with all the cards, zoom in. Try to go deeper into each card. Lay just one card on the table and look at it. Remember: Tarot is a system, all cards are interconnected, and every time you look at one card, you are really looking at three cards: the card that's laying on the table, plus the cards preceding and following that one. What stage represents the card you are looking at? How does your actual situation relate to that stage? Are you there yet? What do you need to get there? How do you feel about getting or being there? Do you want to be at that stage at all? In which way do you think you have surpassed the stage

suggested on the card? How much of the preceding card reflects your actual situation? How much of the following one?

Look at the characters in the cards. Try to understand who that person is. Maybe it is somebody in your real life? Maybe someone from your past? An ideal? Look at the character's face, look at its eyes, and the general expression of its face. Is he happy? Is she sad? If so, why do you feel that is? Is the character really sad, or does it look sad to you? If so, why is that? Look at the character's body, the position of the arms and legs. Where is she going? What is he facing? Are they sitting or standing? Does the character's body indicate movement, or stability instead? How does it relate with the characters in the contiguous cards? What are they holding? In which way do you need these objects they are holding? or... why do you think you don't need them?

Now, zoom in again. Don't look at the cards as a whole, but try to detect what section of the image relates better with the way you are feeling or where you are. Each card represents a stage, and every stage has different steps. You can't cover them all at once. Each card can be brief as a single letter or dense as a whole book. Let your intuition decide how much of the card you need at every specific situation. You will know that there is more in the card for you as soon as you see it.

Any lesson you will learn from the cards using this method will be unique, different from anybody's opinion on Tarot. They will be YOUR lessons. From time to time you will feel the urge of reading more about the origins, mythology, and occult symbolism of Tarot. Do it. It is fascinating. There is a lot of knowledge out there! Go, read all the books you can, talk to other people and share what you know. Most important, share your doubts. Then, go back to the cards. Do an amnesic act of humility and look at them again, trying to forget what you have read and all you have been told; and as soon as you stop looking for opinions, you will start receiving insights.

Tarot is a lifetime task, and I don't want to take too much of your time. You have a lot to do! I just want to give you the basics, the minimum necessary to get you going. The only book you really need to learn Tarot is the pack of cards, and still, If I were to tell you that everything you need is there, I would be lying. The cards are only the wick that ignites the fire. Everything you need to learn to read Tarot is IN YOU.

One last thing: don't be afraid of looking at Tarot. These cards are a tool for meditation, not a creepy toy for doomsayers. If we think that the "Future" is something that will happen to us, we will always be afraid of looking ahead; but if we see the future as something we do, something we create, then we will face it with excitement. Use tarot to envision the future you want for yourself. Choose a card that feels like you

want to feel, a card that looks like that very thing you want to achieve, and look at it. Imagination precedes reality. Imagine your future through the card. As soon as that vision gets solid in your mind, zoom out, add more cards to create the story of the future you decided to work on. Envision that future in the most detailed way possible and let Tarot be your map.

Look at the cards, and as long as you remain honest, you will always be right. Just remember to keep at hand your common sense and your good humor. In the same way that many people see Tarot as an answering machine, I humbly submit that it is an endless source of questions. By pondering these questions we can learn a lot about ourselves, because we can only see in the cards what we already have inside. So, don't blame the cards if you decide to quit your job, leave your husband or abandon your cat; and take what you see with a pinch of salt. All that we can tell about Tarot, plus all of what Tarot can tell us, from generation to generation since the beginning of time, and forever and ever, has to be seen as a big, fat, "maybe"...

And isn't a "maybe" the best possible invitation to keep looking?

How Am I Different?

I am not psychic. I am fluent in the language of images we commonly call 'tarot de Marseille'.

I started to be interested in the tarot when I studied graphic design. The images interested me as graphic objects. I thought they were beautiful and I spent a lot of time looking at them. I have always been interested in how images work, how symbols work. I started by painting and drawing, then I did multi-media work, writing, video ... it was all about contrasting symbols so that people could experience them. I felt that, for me at least, there was something missing in all these media and this was the direct connection with the person at the other end. I needed that connection. You can't really tell how a symbol in a painting, a drawing or a movie affects the viewer. You can't really learn anything because the ultimate interaction usually happens when you are not there. So, after a huge professional crash, I found myself in the position of having to decide what to do for a living, how to further pursue that interest I had in images, and I decided to let my long-time passion for the tarot emerge and become public. I decided to leave everything else and work with the tarot.

Sometimes I feel that, in a culture like ours where art and life are kept separate, and where art has been taken hostage by some experts talking an undecipherable jargon, the tarot may be the only chance a common person may have to experience art.

But it took me a long time to come up with an approach that made me feel comfortable about the tarot because the common image people have of it is that of a gypsy woman with her veil and her ill-talk about curses and cheating boyfriends. I never cease to repeat that the public image of the tarot has been defined by conmen and madmen. That has to be our starting point if we want to work with the tarot. If your car gets stuck in the mud you need to start in the mud to get it unstuck. If you don't deal with the mud you won't move on. I spent years with the tarot being 'in the closet' until I could understand not only the tarot itself but its historical context, so that I could dispel all these things I really didn't like about it, the things that have given the tarot a low reputation and which we can sum up as the tarot's connection with 'occultism'.

The eye-rhymes method came about in some sort of a reactive way. I work with the Marseille Tarot, the tarot of the image-makers, faithfully restored by Roxanne & Jean-

Claude Flornoy. This is the only Marseille tarot that can be considered a truthful rendition of the original Marseille decks. I don't like all these connections with Egypt, Astrology, the Kabbala, etc. I don't like these connections on aesthetic grounds. I find them aesthetically poor and conceptually deficient. I have never seen an astrologer trying to validate astrology by borrowing the tarot's symbols and I have never seen a master Kabbalist trying to validate the Kabbala by borrowing the tarot's symbols. Therefore, I don't see why a tarot reader would need to borrow astrological or Kabbalistic symbols to validate the tarot. As a system, the tarot is complex enough and rich enough to stand by itself. What invalidates all these occult approaches is the fact that all these authors needed to modify the tarot to make it fit their ideas. This suggests that these ideas weren't in the tarot and that they didn't find these ideas there, but instead projected them into the cards, first conceptually, and eventually by redesigning the images. In fact, I would go so far as to say that these connections have diminished the quality of the tarot's images. The last powerful tarot was the one carved by Nicolás Conner. From that point onward the images became progressively weaker and more and more irrelevant. So, I asked myself "if I get rid of all these connections, what is left?" and what was left was the tarot. The Marseille tarot. The tarot that was there more than 200 years before the Golden Dawn even thought about the tarot. The Marseille tarot was there more than 200 years before Paul Christian traced a link between the cards and astrology. The Marseille tarot was there 200 years before Eliphas Levi linked it with the Kabbala, and more than 100 years before Court de Gébelin made all his assumptions about the tarot and Egypt. To really look at the images you need to swim through 200 years of mess. But when you finally arrive at the images, and you see the images phenomenologically, as events happening right in front of you, you start seeing visual connections, visual patterns... rhythms that you can perceive as invitations to let yourself listen. You stop thinking and start experiencing the images. I remember the day I understood Temperance at an experiential level because I was pouring water from a jar into a bottle. I remember how still I had to be in order to not to spill the water, and at the same time, how this stillness brought my mind to a state of total calmness. I felt relieved, I feel soothed, and I wasn't doing Transcendental Meditation, washing my chakras or chanting a Sutra, I was just filling a bottle with water! That day I told to myself "Aha! That is what Temperance is about!" I also remember the day I understood the Hanged Man, with several of my projects canceled and my computer crashing twice, I looked at that card and said "you are right, it's time to be still, time to stop hurting myself by trying. Time to not choose, but to just hang in there".

Now, I don't think that I came up with anything particularly original. What I did was to reconnect with a tradition that was already there. A recent recent link to that tradition would be through Philippe Camoin. His method proposes a very elaborated layout in

order to structure what should be common sense: to look at what you have in front of you and search for patterns. Encarna Sánchez and Daniel Rodés also elaborated on the same ideas, after working with Camoin. Alejandro Jodorowsky's work is less systematic, but follows the same lines. The pitfall of both Jodorowsky's and Camoin's work is to claim that they invented it, which is like saying that one has invented the sound that vowels made when they are linked to a consonant. Before Camoin, Tchalai Unger shared similar views as did Jean Assens. Before them, Paul Marteau hinted at the same principles, and before them all, we have the French language of shape that is known as 'the language of the birds', which is a notion that takes us back to the link between the Marseille tarot and the Romanesque cathedrals of Europe. What none of these authors did was to address the main problem people have with reading the Marseille tarot - the problem of reading the pip cards. Many people are afraid of trying to read them. I found out that Marteau, Camoin, Jodorowsky, Unger... all of them! pulled the same trick: they tell you how important the pips are, but none of them really work with them. So, those who fear trying to read the pips are left with no solution. I made the same mistake myself and for years kept the pips and the Trumps separated, until I realized that the same poetic patterns were at work in the whole deck. That was a truly liberating moment for me! I didn't learn that from any tarot book, but from Oskar Kokoschka, the Austrian painter. Kokoschka created an art school he called The School of Sight. Painters from all over the world would come to study under him, but he wasn't there to teach them how to paint. He used painting to reach them how to see! That is what the pips are for me: a school of sight. They force you too look deeper, but when you finally see, not seeing is never an option again.

The only thing I did was to use the metaphor of poetry to explain the tarot. So far there have been two main metaphors that are used to understand the tarot: the metaphor of the mirror, and the metaphor of the book. We have seen these metaphors being used to talk about the tarot ad nauseam. Each one of these metaphors can be useful, but each one of them also possesses its own set of problems. The mirror-metaphor gives space to all the psychological approach to the tarot: "the tarot is what I feel it is", acting as a Rorschach test. This leads us to indulge in all kinds of psychological elaborations: "Justice is your castrating mother, and The Fool is your animus who wants that bike your castrating mother never got you, so he doesn't have to walk any more". The pitfall of this psychological approach is that understanding something doesn't mean we are going to do anything about it. Looking at the tarot becomes an intellectual massage. The book-metaphor takes us to 'Liber', the Latin root word for Libro (book), 'Liber' means 'free' and alludes to the fact that a book is an aid to our memory: whatever we put in a book is something we can take out of our mind and be kept safe from forgetting. That gives rise to all the tradition that sees the tarot as a mnemonic device. The tarot becomes a memory-aid for meanings we repeat

dogmatically. The book-metaphor also suggests that the tarot works on a linear narrative: page one leads to page two, chapter three will be followed by chapter four... If we put these two notions together we arrive at the all time favorite of occult zealots: the tarot is a repository of secrets. How we love that! Especially if we assume that only Tom Hanks could decode it!

Working again in a reactive way, so I could find new words to talk about the tarot, I decide to search for another metaphor to think about the images, and I found that the metaphor of the poem is very apt. The main idea is that the tarot can be perceived as a model for the human mind, a mind that has a poetic structure. The tarot wasn't conceived as a model of the mind, but we can see in it a model for the workings of imagination. A tarot pack is not a linear structure but a non-linear one: an object moving in space, being constantly rearranged and reordered, just like the imagination keeps constantly shifting focus. We shuffle the deck as the mind shuffles its imagery. At any given time the mind and the tarot present us with a set of images for us to experience. That's what happens in a dream or when we are thinking about something. That's also what happens when we lay some images on the table. At that point we ask ourselves: "why is this popping out at this present moment?"

The idea of the eye-rhymes is to see a sequence of images as a poem in which to detect patterns and watch for rhythms so that we can experience the images without explaining them with symbolic meanings. Looking at the images we detect messages. This takes us back to the notion of the Seer, with the tarot generating visions and messages, just like a dream does. Our objective observation leads to intuitive insight, and this way we obtain from the images what can be called "phenomenological advice". The tarot images are signs that tell us things, in the same way the sky tells us if it is going to rain, or the forward movement of another person tells us if it is safe to cross the street. Instead of saying that La Papesse is the sacred feminine or Isis unshaved, we look at her and she invites us to read, or to remember that there is a moment, right when we take our eyes away from the pages of a book, in which we understand what up to that moment has remained obscure. Instead of seeing La Maison Dieu as the Babel Tower or the collapse of the ego, we look at the image and realize that it is time to take off our hat, remove some old ideas, and let off some steam. The Fool preceded by The Tower will suggest to us to get away from a heated situation, but the same Fool walking towards the Ace of Coins would be telling us to step right to the plate. The reality of the images becomes literal advice, notions our mind will apprehend only after our body understands them, ideas we can enact. That way the tarot becomes a tool for us to fix the little problems we often find while we go on with our life.

This text from A. Grinder and it is one of the best descriptions of how the tarot works:

"Tarot is a dynamic modeling tool. Imagine an 18th century merchant who is about to execute a highly leveraged buyout of his number one competitor. He is anxious and makes an appointment to see the local gypsy. What happens during the reading? Humans are burst thinkers. Problems are usually contemplated in short periods of activity. Concentration is a discipline. We multi-task on a subconscious level, but time-slice in the conscious. The first positive impact of the Tarot reading is that it's an environment that requires directed thinking and concentration over an extended period of time. In fact, I suppose for many (maybe even most?) readings, it is the querent's longest and most directed period of concentration on the question. Humans are creatures of habit. What did you have for breakfast this morning? How many times have you had the same in the last month? Another positive impact of the reading is that it suggests perspectives for examining the question that would not normally occur to the querent, left to his own resources. In fact, as this dynamism is used for directing concentration (as the reader prompts the querent, "this card, in this position, suggests...") and the ability of the human mind to turn random associations into meaning (as the querent formalizes "what does this mean to you..."), guarantees it. Early decision making software would receive subject, object and action "query categories" and manipulate them using arbitrary (but numerous) formula. For example, if I wanted to use the software to consider a marriage, my categories might look like subject: me, object: girlfriend, action: marry, and one of the arbitrary formula might be: Is made of stone? The reliance of the programmer is on the creative ability of the human mind to transmute "Is girlfriend made of stone?" into the consideration of her intractable nature. Early software had the problem of asking irreducible nonsense questions (Is marry made of stone?), but by introducing random perspectives that the querent invests with subjective meaning, any dynamic modeling tool, software or Tarot cards and reader (even a computer), invariably present the querent with considerations that would not have occurred on their own. The gypsy reading our 18th century merchant is certainly completely pre-modern, presenting the reading as the future of the querent. But the importance of the operation actually lies within the querent. Even assuming the most rigorously materialistic stance, we see the querent examining the issue longer than ever before, from unexpected, meaningful perspectives. He is formulating fresh insights and making decisions, perhaps only in the subconscious, which he later takes into the real world. Six weeks/months later, he looks at his life and sees the Tarot reading. That is, he looks at his life and he sees he has acted out on the insights and conclusions he made while applying a dynamic modelling tool to the decision making process. Of course, this 18th century merchant doesn't have anything remotely like the language necessary to express such a concept so he uses the language available to him- "the cards are

connected to the stars", or some such. Tarot works because it is a dynamic modelling tool."

These paragraphs give a very sober idea about what to expect from a tarot session. Since our mind regards metaphors as reality, images can affect people. At the very least, images can modify our perception of things. That is what the tarot does. That is what I have to offer.

Peeking Through the Bars of the Tarot's Occult Prison

The Tarot is a creation of Christian Medieval Europe.

Say that to a typical Tarot fanatic. Some of these zealots will stare at you without blinking, and then change the subject. Others will accidentally swallow their own wigs. Some will even start vomiting up lentil soup, like Linda Blair in "The Exorcist."

Why?

Because the Tarot has been held hostage for over 200 years.

As in any other kidnapping, the motive here is money. Every year, several dozen decks are launched on the market, each featuring the most absurd ideas, theories and points of view. Based on the belief that "no one really knows where the Tarot comes from", a few publishers and authors fill their pockets with money, leaving the true Tarot buried under a ton of lies.

A kidnapping which has lasted 200 years...

It only requires a good look at the Tarot, a single glance empty of ego or personal agendas, to understand that the Tarot comes neither from Egypt, nor from Atlantis, nor from an extinct planet called Krypton. It only takes one good, humble look to see how the Tarot doesn't contain the secret recipe for making Mary Magdalen's favorite salad dressing. It only takes one sober look to understand that the Tarot comes, as I said before, from Christian Medieval Europe. The Tarot developed there. There is no need to go so far astray to understand its true purpose and meaning.

There are many more-or-less logical theories about the Tarot's connection with medieval Christianity. One of my favorite texts on the matter comes from Michael Hurst [...]. You can also consult Jean Claude Flornoy's thoughts [on the History of the Game of Tarot], or search the enormous amount of historical data which can be found [on Trionfi.com].

I have read the words of a very agitated author who claims that a careful look at the life of the Buddha can help you detect a myth of redemption in the Tarot. I wonder why this author had to go so far, when in fact one can find such a myth in the very same culture in which the Tarot originated: Christian Europe. The fluffy logic of

today's average Tarot enthusiast is that we can only speculate about the origins of the Tarot. That is true. But why do we have to take our speculations as far as ancient Egypt, Lady Godiva's menstrual cramps, or the lost Atlantean recipe for clam pie? Christian Europe should suffice.

Obsessed as all these authors have been at finding the Tarot's "occult" code, they have ignored the "public" code, apparent just by looking at the images depicted in the Tarot de Marseille.

Why is it so important to insist on all of this? First, to vindicate the Tarot as an unique instrument of spiritual inspiration native to the Western world. The Tarot can be as useful today as it was 500 years ago because, as Michael Hurst would put it, it invites us to "know our place, practice our virtues, and trust god." This is a useful and powerful message, no matter what our personal beliefs may be. Second, it is important to insist on all of this because the Tarot's contemporary image has been shaped by con-men and lunatics, giving rise to all kinds of absurd theories and bizarre explanations.

Talking about the bizarre, it is good to remember that the idea of the Tarot coming from Egypt was an invention of Antoine Court de Gebelín, an "occultist" who, the story goes, "discovered" the Tarot in 1771 when he saw some ladies playing cards. The Rosetta Stone had been discovered a few years earlier. Egypt was fashionable at that time, and Court de Gebelín had a ball projecting all his fantasies onto the Tarot. He also took some liberties: he gave a fourth leg to Le Bateleur's table, put a zero on Le Mat's card, turned Le Pendu upright... Up until that time, the Tarot had been a work of sacred art, transmitted through a lineage of master image-makers. Master card-makers would contribute their talent to the tradition, reproducing images from an unknown artist. Court de Gebelín started the "Tarot of the Ego." He was the first untrained amateur who dared to redesign these images and claim authorship over them. Today we know that all Court de Gebelín "saw" in the Tarot was false. It was all a fantasy. But these fantasies were perpetuated by several generations of "occultists" who followed suit, adding their egos, and their last names, to the Tarot. The biggest problem we have is that, since Court de Gebelin and friends first laid their eyes on the Tarot, they decided to see in it something else, not the Tarot. This misunderstanding, fostered by a mixture of arrogance and ignorance from these so-called occultists, has given us a carnival of pseudo-tarots, all of them mirrors of their author's ego, none of them truthful to the Tarot's true nature or purpose. From this period come all the alleged relationships between the Tarot and the Cabala, Astrology, the Emerald Tablet, Mexican cock-fights, Yoga, the Chakras and Josie & the Pussycats.

No wonder the image of a Tarot reader conjures up suspicion and contempt in the mind of the general public!

The most notable of these "occultists" was Arthur E. Waite who, in the beginning of the 20th Century, commissioned Pamela Colman Smith to create a new design for the Tarot. Waite is known worldwide for "illustrating" the so-called minor arcana. With this gesture, the "Tarot of the Ego" evolved into the "Tarot for Kids". This is the Tarot of those who prefer to read Paulo Coelho instead of Dante. The Tarot of those who will choose Prozac over Plato, any day. The Rider Waite-Smith deck was built, then, upon a mistaken tradition, one which laid the foundations for all the silliness and madness we observe today in the Tarot: "The Blinking Navel Tarot", "The Ron Jeremy Tarot", "The Krishnamurti Casual Friday Tarot," and a myriad of other clones, all absurd, all far removed from the original source.

Con-men and madmen...

When we look at the Marseille Tarot, La Papesse informs us that knowledge triumphs over ignorance and deceit. Fortunately, there are some people interested in freeing the Tarot from its kidnappers. For them, a return to source-material is necessary. The re- edition of the Jean Noblet Tarot, the oldest remaining Marseille-type deck, means that for the first time in over three centuries we can look at the Tarot as it was, without intermediaries or layers of fairy dust. At the same time, access to historical material is becoming easier. All the lies that have long been encumbering the Tarot will persist only among those who get a kick out of conspiracy theories. Beyond the sirens' song of the market, the possibility of experimenting with the Tarot as an unique visual pathway to self-knowledge has been re-opened...

The Marseilles Tarot Ethos

A description of the Marseille tarot's "ethos" may be tricky as the literature describing it amounts to a succession of the personal, subjective projections of its authors. How not to fall into the same trap?

I wouldn't say there is a Marseille tarot "method." I rather see it as a "tradition."

That tradition can be seen as having two distinctive moments. First there was a time when the image-makers were active, printing tarots. So far, we only have retrieved enough pieces of that puzzle to outline the passing on, generation after generation, of a set of images that have remained somehow consistent, from Jean Noblet (1650) to, perhaps, Nicolas Conver (1760). Sadly, no commentary about the images survived. We know nothing about what these image-makers were thinking when they printed these tarots. We only know the images are preserved with minimal alterations.

The commentary came later. In fact, I would say the second distinctive moment within the Marseille tradition came about in the 1930s, after Paul Marteau "rebranded" these French tarots sharing a similar pattern as "tarots de Marseille". With Marteau, the Marseille tarot became aware of itself. Most people agree that the first appearance of the "Marseille tarot" notion can be found in Papus, who was then referring to these decks either produced in the city of Marseille or exported to the world through the port of Marseille; but for all practical purposes it was Paul Marteau, head of the Grimaud printing house, who in the 1930s "coined" the "Tarot de Marseille" brand and made the deck available for sale. It is said that Marteau was reacting to the increasing popularity of the RWS deck.

In the last ten years we have seen what could perhaps be a third act in this narrative with the edition of decks that hope to "restore" the Marseille tarot images. Most notably we have Chris Haddar, Philippe Camoin and Alejandro Jodorowsky, Jean-Claude and Roxanne Flornoy, Yoav Ben-Dov and Wilfried Houdoin. While the theories and speculations of all these authors may diverge, the point that remains consistent is the preservation of the images. We still see minor additions or alterations, just as we observed among Noblet, Dodal, Chosson, etc. But the images remain the same.

If we observe what happened after the RWS became popular and we contrast it with what has happened to the Marseille tarot, that difference of ethos starts to emerge. For example, the post-RWS "star" is a symbol that stands for something other than a heavenly body. Once we are there, any star will do. Year after year, we see a

proliferation of new decks in which the star-as-symbol takes new and different visual incarnations without stopping to clearly describe what The Star card symbolizes.

Within the Marseille tradition, The Star is that precise image of a naked woman pouring water "À la belle étoile" (under the night's sky). If we were to modify the image we would be stepping outside the lexicon of the Marseille tarot. I am using here the word "lexicon" with a precise intention, as the main characteristic of the Marseille tarot ethos, the only one on which all the commentators agree, is that we are in the presence of a visual language. It could be argued that all tarots are a visual language, but here we are talking about a language that requires no (symbolic) interpretation, as it manifests through direct comprehension, pretty much like street signs.

For example, we often hear or read how The Star card represents "hope". But hope is an abstract notion. In the Marseille tarot, Lestaille gives us the experience of being naked (exposed) kneeling down (surrendered) pouring water (releasing, dropping, giving). The whole image amounts to a feeling of abandonment that we feel in our bodies, not with our heads, and therefore is physical, not intellectual.

If we were to modify the image we see in Arcane 17, switching it for whatever tickles our fancy, we won't experience these feelings.

More important, once the image has been modified we won't be able to map its similarities with Temperance, an image in which a (winged) woman stands, holding the same vases we see in The Star. If we were to choose a different image for Temperance, we wouldn't be able to see these vases she is holding in the two twins embracing under The Sun. These twins can be mapped into the dogs we see in The Moon, the two minions in The Devil, the two persons falling from The Tower, or the two acolytes kneeling before The Pope.

If we change one image, the language collapses.

The commentators of the Marseille tradition (Marteau, Unger, Flornoy, Camoin, Jodorowsky, et. al) agree in a few directions:

- Regard the trumps as a whole, not as a series of individual images.
- Pay attention to the characters' gestures and glances.

In the Marseille tarot the gestures of the characters we see in the cards aren't independent occurrences. We see these gestures, details and elements, repeated

from card to card in consistent patterns. The Marseille tarot is a tool for experience. In a sense, we could speak here of a kind of visual magic, based on two traditional strategies:

- Visual similarity - Visual proximity

The Marseille tarot "spells" ideas by presenting us with the recurrence of signs. Elements that look the same are thought to be conceptually related. Elements that occupy the same position in the cards are thought to be conceptually related.

An additional direction which I personally find worth exploring but that has received very little attention is wordplay. Tchalai Unger writes about it with some detail, showing us how LE MAT (another name for The Fool) is a word that suggests "fool" but also "mast", "matte" and death (as in "check mate"). Jodorowsky also points out how some of the trumps names are actual puns, like LE PENDU, which in French can be heard equally as "the hanged one" or "hard bread."

Once we consider wordplay, we open a door to a rich French tradition of both verbal and visual punning that would take us far back, to Rabelais, Rene Marot, medieval heraldry and all of their successive heirs: Gerard de Nerval, Jean- Pierre Brisset, Alfred Jarry, Raymond Roussel, the Surrealists, the Oulipians, and also esoteric writers like Grasset de Orcet, Rene Guenon and the mythical Fulcanelli. All of them were very much aware of the nature of wordplay as an engine for meditation and thought. Understood within that lineage, the Marseille tarot becomes a tool to unlock the mind to the multiversality of signs.

The Excellence of the Marseilles Tarot

The Tarot de Marseille (TdM) is as a poetic structure that speaks the language of direct revelations. I would like to suggest that the TdM's language operates under a distinct and separate logic than the language of what I would define as "fantasy decks" (Tarots which are fantastical either because they depict fantasy worlds, or because they have been shaped by the fantasy of their individual authors).

This distinctive language has been mostly overlooked in the 20th Century. The most evident, and painful, evidence of this is the idea that the pips (Minors) need to be illustrated to be understandable.

It may seem paradoxical, but I will use here the word 'optical' to define this language in opposition to the 'symbolic' language assigned to the Tarot through its many incarnations in the 20th Century. The word 'optical' will be used here to denote a face value language which generates new, fresh, metaphors in us every time we look at the cards. (I would like to think that this is a logic that links the Tarot de Marseille with the elusive 'Language of the Birds'; but this would be the subject of another essay. Please see Paul Williams' "Language of the Birds" treatise on this website).

This happens because in the TdM's optical language the image is first sign, and symbol second. XVII-L'Etoile would first be seen as a woman kneeling down and pouring water on a stream. Only after this image has been processed both by the conscious and the unconscious mind at face value, may it be seen as 'hope', 'The anima', 'Christ as the morning star', etc, although this is often unnecessary. This would be the opposite of a symbolical understanding of the Tarot, in which each image will always stand for something else than the image itself.

A sign is a direct invitation to act. L'Etoile signals the act of pouring water, just as a fork and a knife together signal the proximity of a restaurant. Will we take a detour to eat? Will we let go of that water? How many times have you seen L'Etoile, understanding immediately its message, without having to utter a single word? At that point, delving in the possible occult meanings of the black bird perched on a tree that's far away and becomes pointless. There is no need for us to take a detour to explain that "Emperor Napoleon didn't like his mistresses to wash their private parts before getting intimate and that is why the Star has a brownish navel." You simply knew what you needed to know. Emphasizing this may seem silly, but it is very

important if we want to understand the value of working with images of high iconic level when our aim is to experience the Tarot as a set of revelations.

Iconicity? Iconic level? What's all that?

Look at the Two of Coins (Deux de Deniers) from the Marseilles Tarot. Two yellow coins comprise the card's whole format, balancing each other. A band emphasizes the dynamic tension between both coins. Looking at the Two of Coins we are reminded of how one single coin reigned over the whole format in the Ace of Coins (As de Deniers). Now that a second coin came into 'being', they relate to each other through equity and balance, a balance that will be redefined with the arrival of a third coin on the Three of Coins (Trois de Deniers).

As soon as two elements start sharing the same space, they create a mutual tension that balances them. Think of two pugilists in a boxing ring, two cowboys ready to duel, a tiger and its prey, two lovers whose eyes lock across the distant corners of a bar, or the famous symbol of Ying & Yang. This transit from unity to duality is perfectly illustrated with total economy of resources in the Two of Coins. The distance between the idea and its representation is near zero. You only need one quick glance to get it.

Now let's take a look at the Two of Pentacles on the Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS) deck. (I will be using the RWS deck for comparison here because it is the oldest deck in the tradition of fantasy Tarots, and the deck that started the trend of illustrating the pips, a gesture that implies making these cards less iconic, therefore limiting their meaning.)

The same two coins, now bearing each one a pentacle, have been inserted into a lemniscate. The symbol of infinite is used here to reiterate the tension between the two coins. On top of that, as if turning the band into a lemniscate wasn't specific enough, the RWS's authors also drew a young guy juggling with the two coins inside it.

Every time I look at this card, I ask myself the same question: "What is that guy doing there?"

The character and his lemniscate are moving the distance between the idea and its representation two steps back. In the Marseilles Tarot we have a card featuring two circles and a curve. On the RWS we have a card featuring two circles, a horizontal eight and a guy with a Turkish hat. The RWS deck uses three layers of elements to say what the Marseilles says with just one.

This comparison is perfect to illustrate the concept of iconicity and how it applies to the Tarot.

An 'Icon' is any image used to represent an idea. This is a concept that comes from Semiotics, the discipline which studies symbols and our relationship with them. (See Paul Williams' Semiotics of Tarot treatise on this website)

Iconicity is a concept that comes also from Semiotics. It accounts for the conceived similarity or analogy between the form of a sign and its meaning. The shorter the path between an image and the concepts it represents, the more iconic image, the less detours we have to take to 'get it'. A high iconic level is a desirable thing for an image because images have a particular quality: their appearance affects their meaning.

In his book 'Understanding Comics', Scott McCloud discusses how people respond much more to a cartoon figure than to a realistic image. This happens due to the high iconic level cartoons have. In McCloud's words, rendering an image more iconic operates a process of "amplification through simplification".

What does this mean?

It means that the more iconic the image, the broader its representational capacity becomes. A simple image makes it possible for all of us to identify with it. Since "appearance affects meaning" we could say that, the simpler the image, the broader the meaning.

The classic example of this is the smiley face. A smiley face shows the higher iconic level possible for an image representing a human being. A smiley face is shortest the path between an image of a face, and a face itself. But it is because of this degree of abstraction that a smiley face represents not just one person, but every single human being on the planet, irrespective of age, sex, or race. A truly amazing thing!

As it stands, a smiley face is both you and me. It can also be my mother, your uncle, that funny guy on TV, a beloved friend and any stranger. A smiley face is so simple that it means both an individual and a whole race at once! This happens because the features of a human face have been streamlined and simplified to the maximum. All that wasn't necessary to represent a face is eliminated, so we can get the idea of 'face' instantaneously.

Now, let's go over the reverse process. Let's take that smiley face and put a tiny straight black mustache on it.

Our smiley face would still be simple, but now it won't mean an entire race. Instead of that it may now be Adolf Hitler, or Charlie Chaplin. We can narrow this down even more if we add more details: a bowler hat would turn our Smiley face into Chaplin. A diagonal patch of hair will turn it into Hitler.

Those details are necessary for us to transform the smiley face into Chaplin or Hitler, but they are unnecessary if we want the smiley face to represent all of us. A mustache, a bowler hat, or a patch of hair limits what the image of a smiley face can do. These details limit the smiley face's meaning, anchoring it to one single possibility.

What does this have to do with the Tarot de Marseille?

Look at I-Le Bateleur in the Marseilles Tarot. This card shows a street magician who is about to do a trick. As it stands, this image represents no magician in particular, but the idea of a magician as it was conceived in the time in which these cards were printed. That magician was the average magician of the time, and given the nature of the woodcarving process, also typical of that time, Le Bateleur's features are simple enough for it to be any magician.

Compare I-Le Bateleur from the Marseilles Tarot with The Magician from the RWS Deck. We can see how the style in which the drawing was made is more realistic. His costume and his face are less generic, more detailed. A historical period, different from the one in which the cards were printed, is suggested by the character's clothes, adding an additional layer of references, this is an additional detour from the idea of a magician.

Compare Le Bateleur's hat with the RWS Magician's hat. In the RWS the Magician doesn't wear a hat anymore. Some people liked to see in Le Bateleur's hat a resemblance to a lemniscate, so, the authors of the RWS got rid of the hat and drew a lemniscate instead. The gesture narrows down the representational power of the image lowering the card's iconic level. Just as Hitler's mustache does on a smiley face, this detail limits the card's meaning.

Look at Le Bateleur's arms. One hand holds a magic wand, while the other hand conceals a coin. This is a typical gesture of *léger de main* (sleight of hand) accounting for the very act of deception. Our Bateleur is any magician performing any magic trick.

Now look at the magician's arms in the RWS. His hands have been repositioned to represent the connection between 'above' and 'below'. Again, this detail limits the card's meaning, giving us only one symbolic possibility.

Look at Le Bateleur's table. The table top is full of objects historically and conceptually linked to a prestidigitator. Some people felt inclined to see in these elements a representation of the four suits of a playing card deck in their primitive form. This is a beautiful idea. Maybe these objects are indeed related to the four suits, or maybe they are just related with a magician and his craft. As the image stands in the Marseilles Tarot, it includes all of these possibilities.

Now look at The Magician of the RWS deck. The authors of this deck gave us oversized cups, pentacles, and swords. Instead of the idea of a magician, thanks to all these gestures we can see how a very specific kind of ceremonial magician is being represented by this Caucasian young man.

In other words, our smiley face became Charlie Chaplin.

Or Hitler.

And we are talking about the Rider-Waite-Smith deck—a deck of relatively simple iconography. Think on all the detours our mind has to take between the idea of a magician and Gandalf the Gray in the Lord of the Rings Tarot, for example.

While I won't state that the Tarot de Marseille's optical language is superior than the symbolic language of fantasy decks, I would dare to say that it is more iconic, and such higher level of iconicity is what gives the foundation and strength to this optical language.

Here, we would have to assume that by the time the TdM in its many variants was being printed, the vocabulary of the Tarot had reached its maturity, or at least some form of stability, making its imagery both repeatable and recognizable.

This is confirmed by the fact that no relevant change in the numbers of trumps, their order, or their main themes have been made since. Today we can observe considerable variations on Tarot's make up, but its structure remains fixed. The Magician in one deck may be a Bohemian cat, while in another deck the same magician may be represented by a character from Planets of the Apes, but the card keeps referring us to the idea of a magician. The only exception to this would be the eradication of the original images from the pips. Their order and structure remains

the same, but their imagery has been somehow ignored and substituted by fantastic allegories of uncertain connection with the originals.

This is crucial to show how all these attempts to 'improve' the Tarot resulted in less effective images. The Marseilles Tarot's simpler images invite our minds to make more connections and analogies than any of the contemporary decks. It gives us more gaps to fill in. This analogical process makes it possible to get faster and deeper insights about our concerns.

I like to see the Tarot as a scalpel. We use it to cut deep into the unconscious mind. A scalpel only needs a swift, sharp, blade, and a steady hand. But some have turned the Tarot into a Swiss Army knife by adding to its images all kind of symbolic gadgets, assuming that by doing so we are adding more narrative elements to work with.

All these narrative elements take us away from experiencing instantaneous revelations. When we look at the Marseilles Tarot there is no need for storytelling. We just get a message.

The message happens in seconds because the cards are more iconic and closer to the original idea each card represents. There is no need to memorize the Arthurian Tales, Flash Gordon's biography, or the Upanishads. All these things can enrich us as human beings, but they aren't an intrinsic part of the experience of the Tarot's optical language. Working with the TdM requires us to forget what we think we know about the Tarot. Working with the TdM we can achieve a unique immediacy of understanding but this will only happen if instead of approaching each image as a conceptual repository of occult knowledge, we experience them as optical events.

The Tarot Talks the Language of the Birds¹

Look at the flame at the top of The Tower. Look at how it repeats itself along the three cards sequence: the same diagonal blue line descends from the top part of The Tower to the middle area of Temperance. Fire becomes water. Then, this diagonal line goes down and gets fractured on The Star. The rhythm created by these three cards together talks about how what only exists as an intellectual fire must become a malleable substance so it can be given to the world. "Get down to business" the cards seem to be saying.

Do you understand?

The Marseille Tarot has a unique quality: it talks a language of direct revelations. When we perceive the essence of its images beyond their symbolic meaning, that is, as a vibration, the images awaken in us the original understanding and knowledge they intend to convey. Right there, the Marseille's imagery becomes music made of pictures. Like music, the images move us without the need of words, for they talk directly to our subconscious mind giving us a kind of strength that comes from an intimate certainty. The Marseille Tarot transforms the act of seeing into a meditation. Taking a poetic license, I would like to suggest that this happens because The Marseille Tarot talks the 'Language of the Birds'.

We can define the language of the birds as a coding system that, it is said, was invented in medieval times by the troubadours to pass on messages without calling attention of the authorities, or maybe just for poetic purposes. As a language of symbols, such language is linked to Alchemy. It is said that the language of the birds may have been inspired by the Sufis, and some authors trace the origin of the term to 'The Conference of the Birds' by Farid Ud-Din Attar, written between 1120 and 1157. Others prefer to think that the term language of the birds comes from the fact that, when a bird whistles its melody, we hear a pretty sound but we don't realize its hidden meaning. Others still prefer to think that the term language of the birds stands for an angelic language, a language of revelations which comes straight from Heaven.

¹ This text suggests a poetic approach to the alleged relationship between the Marseille Tarot and the language of the birds. It shouldn't be taken as historical fact. We may never know the true nature of such relationship, if it ever existed. This is a work in progress. Space constraints only allow me to share a tiny part of it.

There seem to be two different understandings of the language of the birds. One accounts for an ancient system of symbols, while the other, more contemporary, talks about a 'way with words' proper of the French language. Tempting as it may sound for some, I won't be proposing here that the Marseille Tarot is that ancient symbolic system. On the contrary, I am more interested in comparing how that French way with words can be translated into images. About how it gives us clues about how to understand the message that these unknown friends (who gave us the Tarot) hide in plain sight. Several French-speaking authors have explored the relationship between the Marseille Tarot and the language of the birds, but it is my feeling that most of them fell short by looking at this relationship from a too literal point of view. They say things like 'La Maison Dieu' means 'Ila ame e son dieu', that is 'the soul and its God' " or "The bird the Empress is holding ends up flying in The World!" and "There are seventeen lines on La Papesse's book. Card number seventeen is Le Etoile, and it shows a bird perched at an adjacent tree!", and so on.

Instead of this, I would like to propose a different working definition of the language of the birds based on seeing each Tarot card as a letter on a graphic alphabet, and applying to these letters the same rules used in French with words.

Don't waste your time trying to make each card fit the letters from A to Z. Avoid putting yourself into a cage! Instead of that, try to perceive the operative principle behind this analogy.

Look at the letters as shapes and discover the way in which they are visually related. Our alphabet is a system in which each individual part looks different, but even so, they can be visually grouped. The letter O contains the letters C and G. The letter E contains the letters F, I and L. The letter M contains letter W. The letter B contains letter P. Letter K looks like a daughter of letter X and letter I. It also seems as if the letter I had another daughter with the letter C: the letter D. Trying to understand the exact meaning of these relationships is not as important as noticing them. Even so, one can't help but wonder: If the F is an E which lost its feet, did it become more inclined to fantasize?

Apply this idea to the cards. Look for visual connections. Detecting details and grouping them becomes a narrative act. Just as we saw it happening with the letters, the shapes on the Marseille Tarot talk to us.

Remember that alphabets have both consonants and vowels. In French, which is both Tarot's and the Language of the Birds 'native tongue', a vowel is said *voyele* which

sounds just like *voit l'elle*, this is, 'I see it.' We have in the Marseille Tarot a group of cards which talk to us at a single glance: the Trumps.

In French, consonants is *consonnes*, which can be translated as *sonner avec*, this is 'to sound together.' Consonants amplify and reshape the vowel's sound. In the Marseille Tarot the pip cards help us to refine the Trump's visual message.

By looking at one or more of the pip cards together it is as if we are seeing a few consonants together. The image presents itself as an unpronounceable sound. Only when we place a Trump with the pip cards we see them 'talking.' If consonants make the body of a word, vowels animate it. Don't forget that the Tarot is literally a game which was created when the 22 trumps were added to a deck of playing cards. This is, when these cards were given a soul.

These principles leave us with a system to transform rhythm into meaning. The way I approached the three cards we saw at the beginning of this article would be an example of this. But we can explore a new example now:

Your rational mind may be able to access several different meanings of these images, but your unconscious will only pay attention to three things: shape, color and rhythm. Instead of asking yourself "What do I see?" Stop and ask instead: "How does this feel?" In the way of the Zen koan, each card invites us to approach it from outside the limits of our rationality. One of the keys to grasp the language of the birds is the concept of homophony. Homophony means words that sound similar. Two words sound similar because they produce the same vibration, and that is what our four cards gave us: a vibration. By analogy, that vibration will match the vibration of our own experience. Since several different words can generate a very similar sound, one sound can indeed have several meanings, and since sounds are shapes we can hide a message inside a word, in 'plain sight'.

An important characteristic of this code is the fact that it bypasses the usual symbolic meaning of the words. An adept of the language of the birds will detect meaning in shapes, sounds and rhythm and not in the traditional meaning or etymology of a word.

Lets apply that to our images. Realize that you are standing on top of a wheel-like world and you will get the meaning of The Wheel. Arch your back to plow the soil and you will get the meaning of the Thirteenth card. Walk straight without blinking and you will get the meaning of The Fool. Stop to acknowledge the sky and you will hear Judgement's trumpet. Forget that The Wheel was a torture device and see how its

main structure can be narrowed down to a circle. Forget that the Angel of The Judgement is raising the dead and realize that he is surrounded by a cloud which draws a circle too. If you look at The Wheel and The Judgement alternately and you will feel an ascendant motion. A rhythm. But our "word" made up of cards is composed of four 'letters'. The first and last ones shape the sound, while the ones in the middle give it depth. Forget that Death is smiling to you and detect in its arched back and in the lower curve of its scythe a hint of that same circle we saw in The Wheel that is now opening up. That arched back gets straightened up in The Fool, whose eyes lead us to the Angel. This sound made by the word we are seeing lifts us up!

We tend to believe that for sounds to be meaningful they have to be shaped as words, but the words we use to express the feeling these images evoke don't matter. Words are sounds that become feelings, and this is the secret of our language of the birds: it is unspeakable, a shortcut from understanding to knowing that transforms images straight into emotions. A language beyond words.

Patois Physique²

For the purpose of our work the language of the birds would be understood as that instance in which the alphabet-as-body finds its realization in the tarot trumps.

Letters are extensions of the body. The three basic shapes contained in letters (the straight line, the curve, the bent line) recall the limits of the human figure. The I, the L, the T stand for our upright position. The O, G, Q, and C mirror our eyes, our mouth, and the openings of our body, but also the circular outreach of our limbs. The K, Y, V, X are full of elbows and knees. The S, the B, the R, the D allude to the contours of the human silhouette. The alphabet echoes our anatomy.

Letters, both spelled and written, are performative events. Just as pronouncing letters is a physical action close to sculpture, writing letters down is a physical action indistinguishable from drawing.

² "*Patois physique*" is a play on words with "Pataphysics", the imaginary science of imaginary solutions envisioned by the French writer Alfred Jarry. Jarry posed that 'pataphysics was to metaphysics as metaphysics physics. If we consider the letter V we will notice how it suggests two directions of reading. From the top to the bottom the letter V have focusing into the particulars. The gesture remind us of the act of looking at atoms and particles through a microscope. We could see that direction as a representation of the realm of physics. From the bottom to the top the letter V have us looking up, towards Heaven, and expanding our sight beyond what is tangible, a quest that seems endless and we could see as a representation of the metaphysical realm. But if we were to insist on our reductive (top to bottom) reading, if we were to focus so particulars of the particulars that we transcend them, the letter V's axis would have to be extended, so V would turn into X. If we follow the X with our finger, over and over and over, we will find the lemniscate, the symbol for the infinite. That's 'Pataphysics, the science of the particular, and of the laws that govern exceptions. *Patois physique* could be translated as a "physical argot,"* a language in which there aren't big pronouncements, only small gestures. If we force our way towards the small gestures, we find transcendence through them. At that point these small gestures become patterns, abstract principles that deal with the biggest questions. That is the language of the tarots.

*Fulcanelli, the mythical alchemist, suggested that Art Gothic was actually a play on words on *argotique*. This was his way of suggesting that the cathedrals were a "text" written in the language of the birds.

The tarot trumps are made of bodies. The tarots show human figures in different postures with such graphic clarity that their bodies resemble letters. These two kids in LE SOLEIL recall the letter H. There is also an H in the image of LE CHARIOR. FORCE stands like a letter T. LE FOL walks like an R, L'ERMITE stands like a P. There are also two letters hiding behind the tarot's structure: the O and the X. We find the letter O in LE MONDE, LE DIABLE or LA ROVE DE FORTVN, but also in the entire suit of swords. We find the letter X in the suit of batons, in LEIVGEMENT, XIII, etc. The circle and the cross are the two most basic man-made signs. A cross inside a circle is the basis for all magical operations: the voodoo vevé, the Congolese patipemba, the Native American medicine wheel, the mandala, the Anima Mundi... If we follow a circle with our finger over and over and over we find the *guidouille*, the spiral. If we follow an X with our finger over and over and over we will find the *lemniscate*, the symbol for the infinite. In other words, if you enact the image it becomes an experience, a source of some sort of synaesthetic knowledge that is emotional and intellectual at once. That is the experience of the tarots: that immediate understanding that moves quicker than words.

When we put two or more trumps together, we see their body's contorting, their limbs moving. In the tarots the gesture of one character in one card is completed by the gesture of another character in another card.

Letters are structures revealing their own image. A single letter is the smallest score for the performance of an action. When we look at the letter Y, we respond by enacting an immediate "Why...". Spelling a letter is performing it.

The letter M is a score for a performance that has "em" as its final shape. The letter E is a score for a performance we come to experience as "ee...". Together, they form a new score we enact as "me!". This new score retains some of the qualities of the two original scores [e(me)e], yet it turns them into a new shape. On top of that "me" isn't an abstract sound anymore. The score is now directing us to think about ourselves. Once turned into sound, the image has us swerving in unexpected directions.

The tarot trumps are structures revealing their meaning through their own gestures. A tarot trump is a score for the performance of an action. When we look at LEMPEREVR we respond by mirroring his posture: "sit, project yourself onto the room, grab your pants". Performing the trump known as FORCE would have us standing up with our arms tense due to our struggle with an imaginary lion. The performance of LA MAISON DIEV could be enacted by throwing ourselves out of a window (don't try this at home). Together, FORCE and LA MAISON DIEV conform a score that can be

experienced as "tension + out of the window". This final score alludes to an experience we could spell as "release". To read the tarot is to mentally mimic it.

LESTOILLE is a score for the performance of an action we could voice as "kneel down to pour it (water) all out". LA PAPERESSE is a score for the performance of an action we could voice as "sit back and hold it (the book)". Together, these two short motions behave like stills in a movie, adding up to a total action, a new score for the performance of an action we could voice as "pull back". The most direct way to understand this score and its meaning would be for us to actually kneel down. Once you are kneeling down, pull back and sit. Taken at a literal level this is a very simple physical gesture, but such simple gesture is pregnant with metaphorical significance.

In the context of this compound action we notice a transformation: what we see as water in the first trump becomes a book in the second one. This transformation informs our understanding of the act of going from kneeling to sitting: water circulates, a book fixes information. Water flows, books contain. In LESTOILLE water is depicted as a set of vertical lines. We find the same lines on the pages of LA PAPERESSE's book. Here we can see at play the basic principle of sympathetic magic: "equal affects equal". Visual similarity locks a relationship between two elements as disparate as a book is to water and we accept such pairing as "true". The transition from kneeling to sitting (with all the conceptual implications implicit in the act of pulling back) gets enriched by this additional layer of visual correspondences.

There is still a third layer of correspondences we can detect in these images: the transition from naked to dressed. The woman in LESTOILLE is naked. The woman in LA PAPERESSE is completely covered by her clothes. Covering back up (re-covering) adds to our "pulling back" narrative: kneeling turns into sitting back. Water turns into a book. Naked turns into covered. The distance between body and landscape increases.

A fourth layer in our reading has us addressing the transition from "starred" to "veiled". What we see as eight stars on the sky in the first image becomes a veil in the second one. In LESTOILLE the naked woman kneeling down to pour water out is part of the landscape. In LA PAPERESSE, the over-dressed woman sitting back holding a book is severed from her surroundings.

Just like "em" and "ee" add up to "me", with all the conceptual implications implicit in such gesture, LESTOILLE and LA PAPERESSE add up to an overall idea that gets reinforced and re-informed by all the layers of transformation we can see taking place between these two images.

As score, the word "me" invite us to perform a very specific set of physical actions and cognitive calculations. In terms of our body, we could enact the score by pointing out thumb back at us. If we add a couple of more sections to that score, our performance of would take a different path. Paired to "n", "me" becomes "men". Paired to "at", "me" becomes "meat". Both gestures invite us to step into two very different performance spaces, as different as having our LESTOILLE-LA PAPERESSE duple paired to LE CHARIOR would be to having it paired to LE BATELEVR.

LE BATELEVR extends our LESTOILLE-LA PAPERESSE score from "sit back and hold it" to "sit back and hold it. Then stand up and act". Flicking our short frame by frame score, we go from kneeling down to sitting back to standing. The water we were poring out but we fixed in a book turns into a table. Water is raw, formless. Books are fixed, they contain decanted theory. A table is steady as a book. In fact, in the Jean Dodal tarot the book and the table share the same shape and colors. What is present from the book but missing from table are the straight lines that visually linked the book to the water being poured in LESTOILLE. A table needs no lines. A table is a space we clear up so we can work.

By following the water-book-table we notice how the "pull back" score has been extended. LESTOILLE shows a naked woman giving herself to the landscape by means of a raw element. Through the book water becomes a table, a space between the body and the landscape, where that what was once raw has been mastered.

"Men" is as different from "meat" as "book turns into table" is to "book turns into horses". Pairing LESTOILLE-LA PAPERESSE to LE CHARIOR would be very different from pairing them to LE BATELEVR. We will notice other things. First, "sit back and hold it" becomes "sit back and hold it. Then ride on, let them (the horses) take you". An ascending diagonal from the woman in LESTOILLE to the man in LE CHARIOR suggests "taking off". The stars turned into a veil now take the shape of a canopy, a structure that let the figure's sight out without letting the landscape in. LA PAPERESSE's throne becomes a car, a movable machine. There are two horses, just like the two streams of water, and the horses are blue, just like the water is. Through the book, water turns into horses. These horses are water being harnessed.

Both LE BATELEVR and LE CHARIOR extend our initial score by adding one more physical action to the sequence. They also had us to pay attention to different visual correspondences between these tarots. Even so, both trumps extend the LESTOILLE-LA PAPERESSE score in similar, or parallel, ways. In both of our examples, the final part of

our score seems to direct us to "control" our raw material, either by mastering or by harnessing it.

(We can avoid but noticing how, in the Dodal pack, the actual chariot and LE BATELEVR's table share the same colors: flesh to flesh. The horses are blue like the table's legs).

The reading of the character's postures and gestures as still frames of a bigger score corresponds to a hieroglyphical understanding on the images. This is a pictorial language that speaks directly in actions. The understanding of these actions doesn't need the mediation of words: we respond to them with our bodies.

The reading of the transformation of elements between the cards corresponds to an anagrammatic reading the tarots. A notion like "a horse is harnessed water" follows a similar logic to finding that "message" contains "Me, Sage". We are finding a new idea in a novel rearrangement of the elements in the original image/s.

Parallel to these two levels of reading we could notice a third one consisting on acknowledging the autonomy of the aural level of our score. When we describe the trumps aloud, the sounds we make become an experience that has as much specific weight as the images in themselves. When we say that the woman in LESTOILLE "pours" water out we are delivering a sound-shape that could be understood as "poor" or even "purr". When we describe the actions in LA MAISON DIEV as a "fall" we are delivering a sound-shape that could be understood as the actual event of falling down, or as the season that precedes the Winter. LA ROVE DE FORTVN could be voiced as "turning", "around", and then "a (as in "one") round". If we describe LE PANDV as "hanging", the word could turn the image into a command to "hang in there". If we were to describe it as "suspended" we could see it as suggesting "suspended", "suspension", "suspense", or a "pending" matter. Once we translate it as "the sun" LE SOLEIL could be understood both as the heavenly body and as somebody's offspring.

The tarot's folklore has it that this game is present in the names of the trumps. It has been said, for example, that once spelled aloud the name LESTOILLE becomes a sound-shape that could be understood either as "les étoiles" (the stars) or "les toiles" (the clothes/canvases). Our awareness of these things would inform our general reading of the trumps. The starred sky in LESTOILLE becomes a veil in LA PAPESSSE, in other words, "les étoiles" become "les toiles". The important thing would be to always remember that these homophonic games aren't limited to the trump's names, nor to

the French language alone. As a Spanish-speaker I can read in LESTOILLE-LA PAPERSE-LE BATELEVR something like IESTOIL LELA papesSE LEBAtelivr; this is "ESTOY LELA, SE ELEVA!" (I am dumbfounded, it raises!). Notice how that accidental phrase fits LA PAPERSE's attitude. In the Jean Dodal pack, LA PAPERSE has been renamed LA PANCES. An English speaker could easily recognize how this name is one letter D shy from a LAP (d)ANCES. Keep in mind that when we are playing with the language of the bird's our mind doesn't pay attention to grammar, only to sound and sense.

Together, these strategies for reading the tarots will have us addressing the images in their own language, a language that seems to follow the logic of *Similia Similibus Curandur*, this is, a logic that links both magic and poetry. That way we will see the tarots functioning like very specific scores describing literal physical actions that are ripe in metaphorical implications.

Whispering to the Eye: A Few Thoughts on the Marseille Tarot's Optical Language

The unconscious responds to vibration and to shape. The meaning of a concept is its cage, and for that concept to reach the unconscious it must free itself. This, I would say, is the key to understanding the Marseille Tarot's distinctive language. The Marseille Tarot speaks a language of signs which expresses itself through direct revelations. We understand these revelations by drawing an analogy between the image we see and our personal story. Instead of affording an intellectual understanding of ourselves, the Tarot transforms the consciousness so that new realities and possibilities can emerge. The Marseille Tarot speaks the language that we can also see carved in the stone of European Romanesque churches, full of visual puns and graphic messages which are understood in a single glance. That is why they are so easy to miss! That is also why it is so easy to overlook The Marseille Tarot's iconic language. Looking at these images is an enormous challenge to us because we have forgotten how to reach out through our senses. Images are poured into our eyes from increasingly bigger and better screens, sounds get plugged into our ears, we feel life through a joystick or a remote, and we type electric whispers, hiding comfortably inside our virtual placenta.

How can we understand a language that comes from a time long-gone, when men had a different relationship with their own senses? The over-saturation of pictures in our contemporary world renders each image we create obsolete as soon as we produce it. Perhaps that is why the Marseille Tarot's primal, raw and humble images, bearing the voice of the stones within their forms, still have the power to 'deliver' us into this world.

The Marseille Tarot can only be known through direct experience. It expresses itself through shapes and colors as soon as we look at it, speaking a language which, in order to become alive, must kill the meaning of its symbols. It is a language that never lets itself be caged. This is not a symbolic language in the sense that each card is a memory prompter holding a stack of meanings. This is not the language of the occultist's Tarot. The Marseille Tarot is not a book, because books were created to free our memory from its burdens. These cards shouldn't be memorized: they simply awaken our memories when we look at them. The content is not in the card, but in us. The Marseille Tarot is more like the alphabet of an iconic language which we understand without uttering a word because we listen to it with our eyes. This is a language that doesn't contain, but rather reveals, our inner truths.

The Marseille Tarot functions as an autonomous language because it is composed of several basic meaning units, a minimal inventory of concepts that are both decomposable and atomic, and which can be rearranged into a vast number of possibilities. As I suggested [in the essay "The Excellence of the Marseilles Tarot"] what makes the Marseille Tarot units of meaning so effective is their high iconic level, their sharp simplicity.

If we can resist the temptation to find exact correspondences, that is, if we resist the temptation to put the bird into a cage, comparing the Marseille Tarot with our phonetic alphabet can be very helpful in understanding its language.

The Tarot is not the alphabet. The Tarot is an alphabet. Pointing out how the letter A resembles a standing Bateleur won't be as useful as understanding that letter forms carry suggestions. These suggestions may become more discernible if, instead of seeing each letter as a definitive shape, we see them as snapshots of a graphic continuum. Shape is a consequence of movement, and movement is a visual manifestation of space. For the sake of orientation, let's imagine two spatial axes, a vertical one that we will define as 'being' and an horizontal one that we will define as 'becoming'. A single vertical stroke creates the most minimal shape in our alphabet, the letter I. We could take this basic shape as reference, and establish it as "being." The letter I would represent the individual. Now, let's assume that our sense of being gets reshaped by our sense of becoming. This is, when the vertical axis represented by the letter I is activated horizontally, we have the letter I reshaping itself to form all the other letters of the alphabet. When the letter I breaks apart and becomes receptive to the ground, we have an A. When the letter I grows arms to embrace the world, it creates the letter B. If the letter I curves itself, forming a letter C, it becomes receptive to the future. This way, by understanding the 'motion' that took place for the original vertical stroke to become any other letter, the content of such movements becomes an indirect tale. Each letter becomes a play, a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end, giving us the chance to experience the alphabet in an entirely new way. This cognitive shift is similar to the one necessary for us if we want to abandon a symbolic conception of the Tarot, and start speaking the Marseille Tarot's true language. This is a vocabulary made of shapes, and focusing on them is a visual meditation. This way, if we look at two cards in a row we can ask ourselves: "what needs to happen for this image to become that other one"?

Let's look at one single letter. The letter M is one of our alphabet's basic units of meaning. At first sight we could call it an atomic component. Letters are the basic cells of our language and cannot be divided. But a deeper look at its shape makes us think

that the Letter M is also decomposable into a letter V hanging between two letters I. Perhaps a letter M shows two Is holding hands! Obviously, normal communication would become severely impaired if we insisted on derailing our understanding of each letter in this way, but from time to time it might be useful to play this game with letter shapes and let our amusement open the way to new insights. Is not this the very same thing that happens when we look at an individual Tarot card for too long?

In the Marseille Tarot, sound becomes an optical rhythm. Just as 'A' is the sound we experience when we look at the letter A, The Fool is the vibration one gets tuned-into when looking at The Fool. Every person who reads "Aaaaaa" generates a similar sound, just as every person who looks at The Fool comes into contact with the same properties of the image. If we were to ask ourselves "what does the letter A mean?", we would be in trouble. The same thing happens with each Tarot card. Since different people will relate to The Fool's attributes in different ways, we cannot explain in words what The Fool's attributes are. We can only experience them. What we can do is to describe The Fool's basic unity of meaning: a man walks to the right, his eyes fixed on the horizon, while seeming to ignore both the path he walks and the pain inflicted by an animal-like creature who is scratching his 'noble' (like Noblet?) parts. When we look at the card we take in this whole image at a single glance, just as we perceive the whole letter M by looking at it. But this atomic sense, indispensable for the image to become operative, can be decomposed. Now and then we may feel drawn to The Fool's bag, or to his shoes, or to the aforementioned gray creature and its knotty, knotty, paw.

Even so, a letter alone is rarely useful to convey meaning. The same thing happens with each of the Trumps, Honors, and Pips on the Marseille Tarot. Exploring each letter on its own, or exploring each card isolated from its context, is deceptive. Concepts reshape their meanings according to whether they are expressed alone, or in the context of a phrase. Context is, in fact, what makes concepts useful.

To incorporate each simple unit of meaning into a more complex one, this unit must be elementary enough to prevent its own shape from drawing undue attention to itself once it has been integrated into a larger context. This is part of the secret of the Marseille Tarot's iconicity.

Back to the alphabet: notice how much more difficult the act of reading a text becomes if we employ a fantasy font in which the basic features of each letter have been obscured by capricious ornamentation. There is no point in devoting too much attention to each letter, because the meaning of the word "BABY" is not B and A and B and Y. The word's gestalt outweighs each letter's single identity. Likewise, when we

look at some cards spread over a table, we see all of them at once. It doesn't really matter which card was laid down first, or which one second. We apprehend the whole gestalt and it immediately becomes a coherent unit of meaning. The Tower, The Fool, and The Star together become "The fool leaving the Tower for the Star", or more precisely, indicate that we must "get out of there in order to find relief". We are afforded an overview which integrates and expands the individual attributes of the three cards. Just as letters disappear within the words they create, these three cards aren't just three cards anymore, but an event which vibrates analogically with our own experience and thereby reveals its meaning for us.

Syntax allow us to build complex concepts by grouping simple ones. In this way, the atoms of our language: (Pips, Honors, and Trumps) generate larger units of meaning. Instead of going card by card, like a child in a spelling bee contest, maintaining a holistic view of the cards will allow us to practice this unique optical language.

This is the way the Marseille Tarot speaks to us.

For Entertainment Purposes Only

The 'For Entertainment Purposes Only' disclaimer is intended to cover up any possible legal issue. It is specially directed to cover the reader since in many states fortunetelling is illegal, even when these laws are rarely enforced. You can go to jail for telling the future, but a person who is doing entertainment would be safe. As with any disclaimer associated with esoteric practices, the logic is that the client will disregard it anyway, but it is nice to have it "just in case".

Now, I have seen that sign in very few psychic parlors run by gypsies, but the disclaimer is more often used by cold-readers and people in the business of psychic entertainment. In other words, and although there may be exceptions, I take the disclaimer as a sign of a dishonest reader. (If the word 'dishonest' disturbs some people lets re-phrase and say 'readers who aren't totally committed to the truthfulness of their work ;)). In a less critical note there are those readers who see what they do as theater: they play the part of a reader at a Ren-fest, private parties or psychic fairs, and therefore, the disclaimer seems to allude to some sort of histrionic flair in their readings.

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For what is worth, I chose to become a tarot reader the day I understood that a beautiful life, for me, could consist of waking up in the morning and going to a place where I could look at these images all day long while sharing their beauty with other people. I envisioned that this routine could substitute my former life, in which I would share with people images I would personally make, as an artist. I have always been interested in how images work and I also have an enormous interest in people and their narratives, so, I thought that working as a tarot reader would be a better model for that beautiful life that just being an artist. Faced with that vision I immediately understood that I was stepping into very murky waters. So, more than a code of ethics I envisioned some sort of 'aesthetic code' to enable me to jump into tarot readings. That 'code of aesthetics' is very simple and consists of gaining a clear understanding of how readings really work, a sober understanding of the tarot's real history and iconography, and the rejection of all the cliches associated with tarot readers and fortunetelling. The way I see it, tarot readings belong to the same realm of some other impoverished arts like magic, clowning or the circus, whose former glory vanished as their practitioners were unable to evolve into the aesthetic codes of modernity, but as Cirque Du Soleil has proven, these arts can be updated. That's my belief.

A big amount of what transpires in a tarot reading is informed by the expectations people bring to the table and predicting the future is the main idea associated with the tarot. This means that, even when I am clear at stating that I can't tell anybody's future, I have accepted the fact that some people will end up giving me credit for things they think I predicted. That is, I believe, an unavoidable part of what constitutes the illusion of tarot. Even so, I am clear and upfront about the fact that I don't predict the future nor do I see -in the way tarot readings work- any evidence of how this can be accomplished. Same thing happens with quantitative questions regarding dates, amounts of money, age of a soulmate or lottery numbers. Thankfully, I am rarely asked for such things. I once read the tarot for an old woman -the right term I think would be a 'hag'- who listened with attention to all I had to say and apologized afterwards for not being as deep as my reading was since she only wanted lottery numbers! I told her I had no way of getting that from tarot cards and she kept coming once a week for many months just to listen to what I had to say, without ever asking for lottery numbers again. This helped me see what I do as giving some sort of homily. Everybody at some point needs to be reminded of an essential message of trust in their own power of redemption.

Having said that, building a clientele up has taken me a long time because I prefer to work with people who have no previous experience with the tarot and therefore no set expectations. I try to discourage those who entertain strong esoteric views from seeing me. In fact my 'perfect' client is the one who decides to come for a reading after he/she has been told that I am not a psychic and I don't predict the future. Most of these people are often very cynical or jaded, but all of them belong to my same faith: more often than not they believe, or at the very least, they suspect, that art can inspire the better side of us.

A few weeks back a friend of mine came to NY. He is a master at drawing and writing but has been divorced from the visual arts for a while now. He went to the Metropolitan Museum and of all things, he became mesmerized by a small, almost insignificant, sketch made by Degás. "As I stood in front that drawing -my friend told me- I understood how all my life assembled itself so I was brought there, to that little drawing. That drawing gave me a sense of myself, and the courage to continue."

His words reminded me of my favorite story about Henri Matisse. At some point, way before becoming a famous master, Matisse scraped together as much money as he could and purchased a small Cezanne painting. Matisse hung the Cezanne up in his living room, where it spent the next 50 years. After all that time, Matisse donated the painting to a museum. In his speech for the occasion, he confessed that all these

years this small painting had been his sanctuary, a place where he came back several times during his life to seek refuge, and be healed, and to gain focus every time he had a professional crisis. Looking at that painting, he saw everything clear again.

My friend's words resemble those of Matisse almost word by word. They also resonate with my own expectations for the tarot, and with what I expect from my clients to be able to understand or experience. I am sure that makes me a snob, and that certainly limits the amount of clients I will ever have, but I won't have it any other way.

The Marseilles Tarot as a Divinatory Tool

In medicine, it is said that when there are several treatments for a symptom that means no one is totally effective. I think the same thing can be said about tarot readings and methods of interpreting the cards. Methods are aesthetic preferences. We like ones more than others just as we like some decks more than others. (Or perhaps they are erotic preferences: *"whatever turns you on, baby!"*) There is some research concluding that the success of any alternative therapy depends of the belief the practitioner has in his methods. (The reasons for this aren't quite clear but they may have to do with what actors and magicians call a *"silent script"*: a coherent frame of mind translates into a coherence between what we say and all the non-verbal clues we also send while we say it). I also think this applies to our work with the tarot. Those of us who are convinced about our methodologies (or about our 'gifts') tend to be more assertive than those who are trying out a method and aren't still convinced if it will work for them. But by focusing on methods we take our attention away from the real mechanics of the process of a reading, which is a cognitive one. As Ross pointed out, when it comes to a reading it is all about the person who seeks insight. I would add that it is the person that seeks insight who is the one doing most of the work.

There are three things I have researched in order to inform my work with the tarot: cold reading, hypnosis and African magic. I don't practice any of those, and I think many people misunderstand what they are, but they have been very useful for me to understand both the limits and possibilities of *working with metaphors*. I researched cold reading because I believe no one can understand perception without understanding deception. I was told that readings could be faked. From cold reading I learned that *"faking it"* is the same thing, if not more difficult, as doing it for real. I studied African magic after looking into the Western Esoteric Tradition and concluding that it was purely theoretical, and lacking of tangible results. African magic, on the other hand, possesses no theoretical frame (*"somo o no somo"* say the practitioners of Congo Based Palo Mayombe: *"we are or we aren't"*) but it seems to get results. From African magic I arrived at my current working definition of magic as *"the purposeful use of symbols to induce in the mind a process of transformation."* I am still far from being convinced that magic ritual can affect anything but our perception of the external world. But in the right context, and divination is 90% context, 10% content, our perception of reality can be affected so we change the way we relate to the world. Finally, I studied hypnosis after I noticed that the cards are convincers, elements we use to pace and lead a person to a certain conclusion. From hypnosis I learned that -as so it happens with the tarot- its public image has been shaped by conmen; but also that trance-states vary in depth and nature, and that the

mechanics of a tarot reading match the mechanics of a hypnotic session, so, what psychics and fortunetellers call “predictions” may very well be post-hypnotic suggestions.

My current understanding of readings is based in three postulates:

- *It is not what you say but how it is perceived by your interlocutor.*
- *The process of analogy is more important than the symbol itself.*
- *Context is more important than content.*

(To which I could add a forth postulate: rapport is more important than knowledge)

All this to say that these days we know enough about perception, psychology, cognition, brain chemistry, etc. to find more elegant and sober ways to explain what a reading is, along with more responsible expectations about what a reading can accomplish. We should know better than confuse symbols with concepts.

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I suspect that the ‘pure Tarot de Marseille divination’ brand is a 20th Century development intended as a response to the other divinatory tarots in the market. The tarot’s *printed* history has always been about appealing the market. I am not familiar with Joseph Maxwell’s book, but I am inclined to think that the Tarot de Marseille brand is Paul Marteau’s doing. I even wonder of the distance between the printing of his Veritable Tarot de Marseille and the publishing of his book wasn’t a marketing response: he had a bunch of decks he needed to sell, so he provided the discourse that validated the divinatory use of the deck. By this I mean that the idea of going ‘back to the origins’ by using the Tarot de Marseille as a divination tool may very well be a modern, even contemporary, commercial development.

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In general terms I am personally interested in an understanding of the tarot that is based on a understanding of the brain. Any methodology would only be useful in that it helps to craft narratives the reader uses to ‘feed’ the client’s brain. Understanding this goes down to a redefinition of the whole process of the reading and not so much on the specific meanings for specific images. I am not talking about a dramatic change in how a reading is conducted but about a more informed view of what is happening in a reading at a cognitive level, so we can guide the process in a more precise and useful way.

In the past couple of years I have been very interested in the tarot as a neuroplastic tool, that is, I am interested in how the tarot can help re-shape the mind -if not the brain- by expanding the semantic field of these concepts that may have given us trouble at any given time. When we think on something we follow the same thought-patterns over and over, but impacting that field with a random-generated image could serve as a bridge to new words and new thoughts that could re-route these thought-patterns, generating insight. I have also been very interested in the connection between hypnosis, as a technique to engage people's imagination to elicit physical reactions, and a tarot reading. I have come to realize that the hypnotic relationship isn't something you add to the readings at the beginning, middle or end, but it is embedded in the whole reading experience.

When you describe an image in a card you are pacing them so they can accept, by extension, what you say the card signifies: *"and these six scimitars have a sword trusted among them, so the image suggests for you to be careful at poking on the hornet's nest"*. See? Nothing in the image represents a hornet's nest, but by describing what is in the card I can lead them to expand the description to include certain metaphorical or analogical qualities. When you seamlessly extend what is seen in the card to something that you are projecting in it you are using a hypnotic patter. In the same way, you can say: *"and since you got The Tower and The Moon before The Sun, we can see how, no matter how much anxiety you may feel at times, not how little you can see ahead, sooner or later you will reach out and make yourself understood, in a very nice, very warm sense of communion with the world"*. Any fact you can describe about the cards: the presence of an element, a color, a attitude of a character, sets the pace for you to throw several positive suggestions in there. These suggestions are never direct advice, yet they are telling the person how to feel and many times are recalled as predictions: *"everything went as you said because as soon as I lost my job I felt confused, but then I remembered what you said and calmed down and looked at my options."*

All these hypnotic techniques configure the reading. More precisely, these patterns are the reading. Add to that a warm and direct gaze, soft tone of voice, and some rhythmic cadence in the nodding of your head, and you are creating a trance state. You only break visual contact to show them something in the cards, then back at locking your eyes with them. It is all part of the hypnotic process. This has lead me to my third area of interest: the tarot's dialogue with our mirror neurons. The current understanding suggest that the same areas in the brain get active when we enact an action or when we see someone else enacting that action. In the tarot we have several characters behaving in very precise ways, ways that -as I pointed out above- can be

described to a person as a form of *phenomenological advice*. My interest right now centers on understanding to what extent a person who is seeing Temperance -for example- pouring water from one jar to the other could embody that movement, enacting these physical sensations and therefore feeling as the image suggests. My readings may not necessarily seem different from the ones given by other readers (they shouldn't), but in them I am working with these notions to compose an emotional state in my client that may leave her in a better disposition to keep going with her life and enact certain behavior when needed.

In all this, I find that the Tarot de Marseille is a more useful tool because its images are simpler, more *iconic*, and more likely to be understood and remembered by the client. So, while I cannot say that divination with the Tarot de Marseille is a superior branch of tarot divination, I can say that the Tarot de Marseille has attributes that make it better suited for the kind of work I do. At the same time, all these ideas emerge from something that I saw first explored by Paul Marteau. I would dare to say that Marteau's book is not very original in its content. The structure of the book follows previous volumes in which each card is analyzed at several different levels: analogical, symbolic, abstract... but there is one level I found 'original' and somehow relevant on differentiating divination with the Tarot de Marseille from divination with the rest of the tarot decks: this level alludes to the "figure's orientation." Marteau includes a visual/optical explanation for each card based on the character's 'behavior' and on the way such behavior links one card to the other in some sort of visual 'dialogue'. The metaphor of the 'tarot as a mirror' is usually used in a projective sense: we see ourselves in the cards at a psychological level. I am interested in a literal approach to that metaphor: the tarot as something we physically mirror so our brain can enact certain emotional attributes linked to a certain physical action.

As far as I know, the 'following of gazes' and of the figure's orientation is something particular to the Tarot de Marseille tradition. I insist on seeing it as a 20th Century idea. This idea is hinted at in Marteau and fully developed by Tchalai Unger, Jodorosky, Camoin, etc. Still, their focus was on the symbolic value of the character's posture while I am interested in *the psycho-physiological value of these postures as ways to model behavior*. The 'optical language' notion is taken to be an ancient idea but I only have been able to trace it back to Marteau. By that I don't even mean that Marteau invented it, but that all the authors who use these ideas have Marteau as a common reference. The 'optical' idea is often linked to the language of the birds but no one has developed a comprehensive understanding of that connection, perhaps because we would need to craft a comprehensive understanding of the language of the birds in the first place and most of what I have personally read on the topic lacks historical validity. On broader terms, the connection between the Tarot de Marseille

and the language of the birds is articulated by the 'language of the cathedrals' as a bible for the illiterate, which makes mandatory for us to have a clear understanding to the tarot's connection to Medieval Christian Europe if we want to explore this path in the right direction.

In other words, while it may be tempting to say that the 'tarot's optical language' idea has an ancient origin, I see no reason to think so. The visual/semiotic/psychological/cognitive approach to the tarot probably emerged in the second half of the 20th Century. How could it be different if all these disciplines developed in that precise Century? But a point I would like to make is: the esoteric market believes in a myth that follows a very precise narrative in which something ancient that was *hidden* gets *revealed*. We will find that pattern in all esoteric manuals, from De Gebelín to the 2012 craze. Even so, and as appealing as this narrative may be, antiquity doesn't necessarily lend validity to a system. (What can be argued is that the impression of antiquity lends credibility to a system. At least that idea seems to inform the creative endeavours of most esoteric authors).

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I am always very interested in the observations people make on the details of the cards. I think these are usually very useful. Anything we can point out in a card is good material to pace and lead a client into a certain affirmation or conclusion, even when these observations rarely have any historical credence. Maybe I am wrong and Maxwell is the exception, but they are more exercises of imagination than anything else. All of them have a common basis which is a delight in the Tarot de Marseille's beauty. The most important thing I have learned through the tarot is that beauty is never useless. These days I have been thinking that beauty is somehow overlooked. I am not talking about being beautiful, but about beauty for beauty's sake. We are obsessed with profit and we don't tend to see beauty as profit. I suspect that beauty is the only 'super' natural power there is.

I think that is what I truly 'sell': the opportunity to experience beauty because beauty has a restorative power. I believe beauty to be contagious. At least, I believe you can make a sense of beauty contagious. This reminds me of something Oliver Sacks wrote in his book *"The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat"*, in the chapter devoted to *"The Lost Mariner"*:

"The sisters were right -he did find his soul here. And so was Luria, whose words now came back to me: 'A man does not consist on memory alone. He has feeling, will, sensibility, moral being... It is here... you may touch him, and see a profound change.'

memory, mental activity, mind alone, could not hold him; but moral attention and action could hold him completely.

But perhaps 'moral' was too narrow a word -for the aesthetics and dramatics were equally involved. Seeing Jim in the chapel opened my eyes to other realms where the soul is called on, and held, and stilled, in attention and communion. The same depth of absorption of attention was to be seen in relation to music and art: he had no difficulty, I noticed 'following' music o simple dramas, for every moment in music and art refers to, contains, other moments."

I often find myself taken by the cards' beauty while reading the tarot for others to the point of loosing my train of thought. In these occasions I truly feel that the tarot is one of those realms *"where the soul is called on, and held, and stilled, in attention and communion"* as Saks says.

There is another word in that quote that I think is relevant here. This is the word 'moral', even when Saks doubts it. I am aware of how much we dislike that word these days. The underlying, untold, social premise seems to be that we shouldn't talk about moral/morals. But I wonder IF a 'moral sense' could be seen as an unique quality worth taking into consideration when reading with the Tarot de Marseille, given the original nature of the trump cycle as a moral sermon, or a least, as a narrative in which the moral virtues play an almost catalytic role. *(If anybody has expressed that idea with extraordinary eloquence it has been Michael Hurst).*

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I was talking about the mix of both: to remind someone of his/her "sense of self as a responsible agent whose actions shape one's own character" by providing specific tools as they appear described in the trumps: fairness in relationships, moderation in our appetites, fortitude to pull ourselves through, a sense of prudence that matches our interlocutor, etc. What I find extremely useful is the way in which, in the Tarot de Marseille, the moral virtues provide us with a structure to give advice. The virtues affect the two cards that precede them. If we work with three cards alone, any card that falls at the end of a three-cards row can take the attributes of a virtue and point out a way of proceeding in regard of the situation defined by the first two cards.

Just as the three virtues have very distinctive attributes, each one of the characters in the cards have attributes that could be worth imitating. I am working here under the assumption that the tarot preaches by example, in a sort of visual sermon. The Emperor, for example, isn't a virtue, but it is possible that at a certain point in our life

we feel the need of projecting authority, just as he does by holding his scepter, while practicing self-control, just as he does by holding his belt. In other words, at some point in our lives the Emperor's attributes may be worth imitating. The Fool isn't a virtue but he also possesses attributes that could be useful at a certain point: to hit the road, to travel light, to keep sight of your goals, to ignore what distracts us from our path... All these images are examples of ways in which we can behave. This way each image becomes a very direct and practical piece of advice that is expressed through the attributes of its characters. Even La Lune, by showing no human being, advises to become absent and wait until things become more clear. So, when I am talking about 'moral advice' I am talking about providing the client with tools to model/moderate her behavior in ways that may make it easier for her to go about with her life. In a way, what I am suggesting is to turn the 'tarot as a mirror' metaphor backwards, so we don't look at the cards to detect how much like us The Emperor is, but how can we be more like The Emperor.

When I am working with the tarot my main goal is to burn an image, just one image, in the person's mind so she can recall that image at the precise moment, eliciting a series of emotional and physical responses. Psychiatrist Milton Erickson was very good at 're-routing' people into a normal baseline behavior that had to do with becoming functional again. He didn't subscribe to any psychological school or theory, and he rarely cared about the patient's childhood, past traumas, etc. More often than not he felt that there was no point in dwelling in the client's past. So, by small direct and indirect adjustments he was able to bring the patient back to his/her normal functioning. We tend to frown upon the idea of 'normal', just as we don't like to talk morals, as if both ideas imply surrendering our individuality or uniqueness, but by normal he meant being able to function in society, something that is very much in tune with returning to a "sense of self" but also includes a sense of the other. I bring all this up because I wonder if, instead of exploring these images in a "how does that makes you feel" kind of way, as some people do, it may be a lot more precise, and useful for the client, to simply acknowledge the moral layer that the whole tarot tale brings about. And then again I wonder if such moral layer, corresponding with the *quadriga exegesis*, is something that can be seen as exclusive of the Tarot de Marseille, or all pre-Gébelin tarots, and it has been somehow overlooked since.

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I consider a tarot reading to be the one of the most irresponsible things a person who is haunted by a problem can do. It is counter-intuitive and utterly insane to say to someone: "Well, since you have that problem come and sit with me, let's look at these images because they are beautiful" and even more insane for that person to oblige.

But I do so on a daily basis because I believe that beauty has a restorative/redemptive power. Beauty can be very inspiring, or at least, can inspire us to act in ways that are consistent with that sense of beauty. No one can tell us what is going to happen, no one can tell us what to do, but we can always be reminded of that sense of transcendence we are all capable to feel and aspire and which links beauty to morals.

Embodied Tarot: When Medieval Draftsmanship Mirrors Cognitive Science

I am a tarot reader. (Yes, I know. When I tell people I am a tarot reader I get the same reaction I would get by claiming to be a stripper, minus the erections). The thing is, I approach the cards from my background as a visual communicator who understands that the job of an 'image maker' is to affect people through images. You probably know that the term 'empathy' was used by a psychologist, Theodor Lipps, to describe a certain relationship between a person and a work of art. For me, the tarot is at once a tool and a research field to understand that particular kind of empathy.

When you tell people you like tarot cards they tell you these images are associated with insanity and chicanery. You look around, you visit a few new age shops, read a few books, treat yourself to a few readings and end up confirming what you already thought: the tarot's public image has been modeled by con-men and madmen. Trying to reconcile a love of the imagery of the cards with that harsh fact is difficult. It helps to know that the tarot's official history is a fraud concocted in the 18th Century and that all the attitudes and superstitions around the cards evolved from that fraud. It also helps to know that in the last 20 years, a few serious researchers and historians have come forward with important and solid historical data that show how the tarot is a product of Christian medieval Europe and that it was initially conceived as a game of chance. Now, here is where things start to get interesting. First you learn that a long time before the tarot was used for divination it was used for poetic purposes. That is, the cards would be dealt out to a group of ladies and then the poet would improvise a few verses of poetry, comparing each lady with the image she was holding. The tarot was first, then, a game of analogies! When you dig a little deeper still on the use of analogies in the Middle Ages, you end up uncovering the notion of symmetry. In a work of art, each detail mirrors another detail either at a visual or at a conceptual level. All these details together mirror the larger work, giving the viewers a visual thread that would map endless conceptual connections and suggest to the mind a certain learning pathway. Most medieval visual documents were crafted with this notion. At this point, the visual nature of the tarot starts coming forward, and with it, the beauty of its design.

The medieval notion of symmetry made use of images to facilitate analogical thinking. Cognitive scientists today see analogies as a suggestive way to foster creative problem-solving. Many of the experiments suggest that when we use a graphic, or an image, to illustrate an analogy people understand the analogy more

easily because it is easier for us to map visual sameness than relational sameness. All these ideas make it possible for us to start thinking about the tarot in different terms. The depth of the tarot's original didactic intention is hard to establish. It was, after all, a game of chance which is still practiced in many countries of Europe just as we would play bridge or poker. But thanks to people like Michael Dummet, Gertrude Moakley, Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis, Robert O'Neil, Ross Caldwell and Michael Hurst we can trace its whole narrative sequence back to a 'summa of salvation', a morality tale that is a reflection of the time in which the tarot was created. That is the reason why you have never heard this story. The ideological agenda of the 'new-age world', which has claimed the tarot as a counter-cultural space for those who reject any official, male-modeled spirituality won't have it. The market wants what the market wants.

Even so, if we want to understand the tarot as a visual document, we will do well to acknowledge the notion of symmetry – and its correlation with the tarot's use in playing with analogies – as a viable starting point. The current understanding of the tarot, rooted in a fraudulent history, has it as a repository of symbolic knowledge. In practice this reduces the tarot to a set of mnemonic keys whose alleged meanings are parroted without taking into account the actual images. Very influential in this view has been the adherence by many tarot enthusiasts to the Jungian notion of archetypes and synchronicity as a way to explain the tarot. Disregarding the inherent value of such models, they constitute an a-historical view of the tarot that contributes nothing to our iconographic understanding of the trump series, and reduces the experience of the images to a mere intellectual exercise.

As an alternative, I propose a phenomenological approach to the tarot that doesn't focus on symbolism as an intellectual construct but rather on the way we experience images. By contrasting the the medieval notion of symmetry with our current understanding of the brain through up-to-date cognitive and neurological research we will be able to apprehend the tarot's language of shape. That way we will learn that in order for us to experience these images we must see them as actions, always keeping in mind that shape is a manifestation of movement. We must understand each card as a snapshot from a movement in a sequence. It is not that The Magician is 'Snapshot One' and La Papesse is 'Snapshot Two', but that The Magician includes the actual, visually verifiable act of standing up straight we see depicted in the card and it includes both the moment before and after that action. In other words, every image suggests a sense of flow. How do we experience that flow? We do so by mirroring the image. In its purest state, each image gives us a very clear directive: "Do as I do. Be as I Am."

Mirroring is implicit in the idea of symmetry. Both are rooted on detecting sameness, a notion that is brought forward by analogical thinking.

Linguists suspect that we understand the world in terms of metaphors and that an important part of how we think about the world corresponds to our physical orientation in space. A very intriguing example of this is our understanding of time. Most of the metaphors we use to think about time are mapped from our relationship with space. In the tarot this becomes obvious as Left becomes 'the past' and Right becomes 'the future', so we can read the passage of time as a narrative and literally 'travel' through it. As we use our spatial orientation to orient ourselves though time each one of the the character's postures on a card contains information about where we are, where we came from and where are we going. Here the idea of flow is again implicit. Using our body to orient ourselves both in chronological and experiential time implies mirroring with our body the flow we see in the cards. Current research on mirror neurons suggests that perception and action are linked and that the very act of contemplating an image engages the motor areas of the brain related with the performance of that action. More important, even contemplating an action engages us emotionally because those areas of the brain connected to mirror neurons are linked to the areas of the brain concerned with emotions. The implication this may have for our understanding of body movement is profound. Researchers who study emotions have found that mimicking facial gestures elicits the same emotions we normally associate with these gestures. Pantomiming sadness, for example, would eventually erode our sense of being content. Just as mood can affect our body posture, our body posture seem to be able to affect our mood. Mirroring a tarot card means embodying the features it represents, so each one of us could access our own experience of that body posture. In the tarot, "do as I do" becomes "feel as you have felt". This mirroring serves as an opening for all the memories, beliefs, thoughts and sensations we have learned to associate with the specific action we see depicted in the card. Experiencing a body posture is a way of bringing forward our experience of the world. Given that this a subjective experience it opens the door for all our personal background and biases to fill-in the gaps, giving that body experience a unique and personal quality. In this way the tarot's images can facilitate creative thinking by means of analogy. A card elicits our experience of our own body, and with it, our vast store of knowledge.

From a cognitive point of view, the tarot's images are useful in narrowing down the field from which we can map the analogies between our current situation and our past experiences. From the perspective of the body, mirroring the tarot's images imparts in us a sense of orientation, it gives us a key to access these past experiences and a way of grounding our circumstances in our physical sense of self.

In my Lecture Notes I alluded to the medieval *quadrige* exegesis as a feasible coordinates that may facilitate our lecture of tarot. This schema proposes four levels of lecture for a document: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. A phenomenological approach to the tarot would link the first and fourth layers of meaning and focus on them, leaving purposefully aside both allegorical and moral levels. It is my contention that the allegorical and moral level of the tarot are intrinsically linked, since we need to understand an allegory in order to read its moral implication. I do believe these levels to be useful in a reading, but understanding them supposes a familiarity with the history and iconography of the images that I don't feel entitled to impart here. There is still much debate on the actual iconographic origin of the cards. Even so, I urge the serious student of the tarot to seek the work of those authors I have already cited. Besides, my practical experience suggest that a non-symbolic approach to the tarot is more likely to generate practical information for the client. To underline the way in which our anagogical reading of the tarot is based on the literal one, in my Lecture Notes I proposed the formula: objective observation prompts intuitive insight. This essay could be seen as an expansion of that idea. 'Objective observation' will be inspired here by the theory of embodied semantics as way to help us understand the notion of shape-as-meaning, an idea that gives root to the tarot's visual language and suggests that there is enough information in the posture of the characters featured in the cards for us to detect meaning without having to refer to any symbolism. In my work with the tarot I understand embodiment at two different levels. First there is the automatic physical response a person may experience by looking at an image. That response can be strengthened by describing the image in the card as an action instead of seeing it as a symbol. This is a sort of automatic mirroring in which the person's experiences of that action - plus all the abstract concepts they have learned to relate to it - are elicited. At a second level we have the conscious action of mirroring the image, expressed when we suggest to a person that acting like the character in a card could be a positive course of action. In the conversations in this book I will suggest that we can build up the second kind of mirroring on top of the first one, in a pacing and leading schema. For now let's just say that the physical description of an image serves both to activate a memory search in the person (sometimes this will be defined as a transderivational search or 'TDS') that occurs as an automatic response, and to point out a specific attitude the person may purposefully enact.

It is for this reason that the description of the image must focus on the human character we see in there. That human character, which very often is the main figure in the card, is the easiest element to map to the person who looks at the cards. It may be possible that at some point someone would feel they identified with one of the

horses in The Chariot or with the black bird in The Star, but it is more likely that the person will mirror the charioteer or the blonde woman pouring water. In order to help us focus on these human characters I have devised a 'grammar' that will help us articulate the different parts of a character's body and detect a coherent meaning. The basic elements of this grammar can be found in "An Ecological Approach to Perceptual Learning and Development", experimental psychologists Eleanor Gibson and Anne Pick state that the successful development of a baby depends on three key elements: Communication, Object Perception and Manipulation, and Bodily Motion. In order to thrive an infant must be able to engage in meaningful communication with others. At a very early stage this communication is of a non-verbal nature, consisting of gaze, gesture, and vocalizations. After this initial stage the child starts interacting with objects and understanding their meaning by experiencing their effect. Eventually the child's legs and spine will be strong enough for him to become an 'object among objects', interacting with others from a more movable perspective. I confess that I read these findings with great curiosity and excitement, because they closely match my interpretation of the observable features of a character in a tarot card. When I was trying to synthesize a methodology to observing the images, I noticed that, with the exception of The Moon card, every single one of the trumps had a main character, and therefore, each single card could be mirrored from the perspective of our body experiences. (Even The Moon has a physical component, as it may be argued that an absence of human figures in the card suggests the possibility of our physical absence. Advice doesn't get much more direct than that!). I also noticed that there were three constants in all the cards: all the characters have a head, a body, and two hands. I noticed that the character's head could be categorized in three ways: facing left, facing right or facing straight forward. There were also three postures for most of the bodies: sitting, standing, or walking. Finally, while the hands of all the characters can be seen in several activities, they were always engaged in some action. Such action gives meaning to the objects these characters are holding, and by extension, they define the meaning of the four elements illustrated in the four suits, since they are all elements we handle with our hands, and therefore their meaning is the use we make of them. It was clear to me that by describing each one of these features in one card we could get a sense of what each specific posture means to us at an experiential level. More importantly, by looking at a few cards in a row we can see a movement sequence that can be described as a story. I want to make very clear that I am not claiming any historical validity of such meanings. I have devised a way to look at the cards that is founded in the tarot's medieval origin. That is, I propose we read the tarot using the same coordinates that we would use to read any other medieval document: by acknowledging the four-layered reading proposed by *quadriga exegesis* and by following visual symmetries to prompt analogical thinking. But I am not using these

coordinates to explain the tarot, only to activate it as a visual language. I have condensed all these keys into a poem:

Presence is meaning.

To the left, remembrance, to the right, l'Avenir.

Those who look straight at you are seeing the present.

Fill your head with attention.

Do what the images do, not what they say.

Sit passively, stand receptively and walk actively.

Embody your destination.

**Duel with the sword, build with the wand,
offer a cup, plant a coin.**

Let the hands show your intention.

**Forget what red is and notice what is red,
stand on a number as you would on a hill,
strip down to your armor;**

**for what turns gold into lead also turns salt into sugar,
what one step fulfills another could encumber
and what you wear wears you down.**

Know an image by its friends:

the deepest truths hide in the obvious.³

Let's look at it section by section:

Presence is meaning

stands for the very idea of embodiment. Each one of the tarot's images features a main character and that main character has a body we can mirror with our own body. The very act of a character being there, illustrated in the card, is a message, a piece of direct advice: "Be like me! Stand up straight on your own two feet, remember where you came from, practice your craft and honor your talent". Such words spoken by the reader will elicit a metaphorical mapping from 'doing' to 'being' in the client's brain. Remember, one of the main findings of current cognitive science is that thought is mostly unconscious. We go through memories, connections, inferences, and sensorimotor responses without being consciously aware of it. We simply cannot help doing it. That is why the reader only has to describe the action depicted in the cards to get the process going in the client's brain. The main assumption here is that, given

³ This poem appears as "The Tarot: A Gestural Language for the Common Man" in Tarology, p. 84.

the context in which these images are being described in a reading about that person, the client's brain will naturally map anything the character is doing into an orientation about how to behave. More precisely, the literal attitude described from a card will be mapped by the client's brain into a metaphorical way of being. There is no 'technique' and no magic words. And there is no right or wrong description of an image. What we really want is for our words, our 'interpretations' to get out of the way so the client can experience the image at a pre-verbal level, with our words simply building on top of that experience. But of course, our brain won't simply process that information at a literal level. Metaphorical thinking emerges from our literal experience of the world. At a basic level our literal language accounts for our direct, embodied experience of objects and events, upon which we then we build more abstract models of communication by giving all those literal experiences a metaphorical value. In this way we use our direct experience to describe events that aren't directly linked to our 'here and now'. Since all metaphors imply a transfer of properties from the source domain to the target domain, we can use what we physically know in order to understand or describe what cannot be experienced physically. I have already described the way in which we use space to map our understanding of time. By looking at a few cards in a sequence we can see the passage of time in the way we have experienced it. But it's not only a spatial orientation which defines our understanding of time. Each one of the tarot's images depicts a motion that carries implicit a sense of timing. Compare for example the steady pace of The Fool with the abrupt momentum of The Tower. There is a speed in Judgement that we don't see in The Hermit, and a steadiness of pace in Justice what we may intuit in The Emperor but feels very slow compared with The Magician. This sense of timing comes again from our personal and direct experience of the actions depicted and suggest narrative elements that can be used in a reading.

Here I would like to point out something so obvious that it may even be perceived as absurd: the identity of each one of the tarot's characters is defined by its posture. The Fool is walking with a bag over his shoulder and a walking stick in the other hand, while being chased by a dog. If we decide to represent The Fool sitting on a throne and holding a scepter, he won't be a fool anymore. Those are the attributes that give visual identity to The Emperor. Shape is meaning and, therefore, each character's posture is meaningful because it can be mirrored by us and it can be experienced from a multi-sensory perspective. We can remember how it feels to walk in a landscape - here, again, we see time being illustrated - and we can remember the smell of the countryside, recall the warm feeling of the sun on our back or recall the scary thought of being chased by a dog. More importantly, mirroring the image it would suggest to us that we should ignore that dog and walk at a steady pace. At

either a literal or metaphorical level that is all we need to be told by the image because that is all of what that action can afford us.

**To the left, remembrance, to the right, l'Avenir
Those who look straight at you are seeing the present**

is alluding at our space-time coordinates: we learn to understand time by moving through space. In their book 'Philosophy in the Flesh' George Lakoff and Mark Johnson provide us with a very clear model for this metaphor:

The Moving Observer Metaphor

Source Domain (Spatial Motion)	Target Domain (Temporal Change)
Location of the Observer	The Present
Space in Front of The Observer	The Future
Space Behind The Observer	The Past
Locations on the Observer's Path	Times On Motion
Distance Moved by the Observer	Amount of Time 'Passed'

These simple coordinates: Left (Space Behind The Observer), Center (Location of the Observer), Right (Space in Front of The Observer) are giving us something to see, something to mirror, and therefore, something to understand: a sense of flow, a storyline, a narrative continuum that we can define as 'what is happening' or 'where we are going'.

Current research on embodied meaning tells us that we build our more abstract thoughts on top of our bodily experience of the world, from the very basic directions, like up, down, straight, curved, diagonal, horizontal and vertical, backwards and forward, to the most complex mental operations we are capable of, like mathematical or philosophical inquiry. That is why, when we refer to a man in terms of him being 'straight', we don't assume he has an iron rod instead of spine, when we refer of a certain person as 'twisted' nobody suspects scoliosis, or when we talk about a woman being 'cold' no one would consider using her to storage fish. We are able to automatically transfer these attributes from our original experience to the new context that is presented to us. Back to the tarot, even if from an iconographic point of view The Hermit could be seen as representing either the reversals of fortune in the form of old age, Time or ascetic renunciation, we must first and foremost see it as man walking with the help of a cane and a lantern. A person may not know anything about asceticism, but we have all used a lantern at some time or another along our lives.

Knowing what the card means from an iconographic -moral/allegorical- point of view is important to us, but that is not what would be more pervasive when talking to a client. That is all theoretical information that the client cannot necessarily link to her personal experience. But we all have used a lantern to see, and therefore, we could use that experience to understand other events, different from using an actual lantern. So, we can be confident that when we are describing to a person how The Hermit is “using his light to gain clarity” this person won’t be just hearing us talk about changing the front porsche’s light bulbs, but potentially about an issue that needs to be understood. Joseph Grady speak of primary metaphors as those first level abstractions we map from our bodily experience of the world. Among these primary metaphors we have “UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING”:

Understanding is Seeing Metaphor

Source Domain (Vision)	Target Domain (Understanding)
Object Seen	Idea/concept
Seeing an Object Clearly	Understanding an Idea
Person Who Sees	Person Who Understands
Light	“Light” of Reason
Visual Focusing	Mental Attention
Visual Acuity	Mental Acuity
Physical Viewpoint	Mental Perspective

Notice how all of these mappings apply to The Hermit, and how the literal description of The Hermit’s attitude or posture can be understood metaphorically in virtue of the ‘Understanding is Seeing’ metaphor. The crucial point here is that we naturally map these sources to these targets in our daily lives without paying too much attention to it. That seems to be how abstract thought arises. So, when I talk about reading a card literally as the most direct way of eliciting experiential meaning in a person I am not inviting you to cross your fingers, trust your ‘gift’ and guess, or try to get it right by any cunning device, but to understand and utilize the way our brains make meaning. Below I have copied a list of primary metaphors compiled by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. I have paired some tarot images with them. Try to think of sentences in which the literal description of the images can elicit these primary metaphors:

Affection Is Warmth:	The Sun
Important Is Big:	The Pope, The Devil, Judgement
Happy Is Up:	Judgement, The Magician
Less Is Down:	The Hanged Man, The Tower
Intimacy Is Closeness:	The Sun, The Lover
Difficulties Are Burdens:	The Fool, The Star, Temperance
Similarity Is Closeness:	The Devil, The Sun, The Moon
Linear Scales Are Paths:	The whole suit of Wands, Swords, Cups or coins
Organization Is Physical Structure:	The Tower
Help Is Support:	The Tower, The Chariot
Time Is Motion:	The Wheel of Fortune, The Hermit, The Hanged man
States Are Locations:	The Hanged Man, The Devil, La Papesse, The Wheel of Fortune
Change Is Motion:	The Wheel of Fortune, Death
Purposes Are Destinations:	The World, The Chariot, The Hermit, The Fool
Purposes Are Desired Objects:	The Lover, The Fool, The World
Causes Are Physical Forces:	The Star, The Wheel of Fortune, Death, The Tower, Judgement
Relationships Are Enclosures:	The Lover, The Sun, The Tower, The Devil
Control Is Up:	The Hanged Man, Justice, Strength, The Emperor, The Empress, The Tower, The magician
Understanding Is Seeing:	The Hermit
Understanding Is Grasping:	Strength, La Papesse
Seeing Is Touching:	The Sun, The Hermit, The Tower

You may notice how the same images have been paired with several different primary metaphors. If we talk about The Hermit in terms of “using his lantern to see” the ‘Understanding Is Seeing’ metaphor seems pretty apt, but if we were to add “The Hermit is using his lantern to see where he came from” then we will need the ‘Time Is Motion’ metaphor to map the left of the card to ‘the past’, the right of the card to the future and the whole left-right motion to the coordinates of The Hermit’s lifetime. While at a literal level The Hermit may be visually tracing back his steps, the sentence invite our brain to take its metaphorical meaning as in “looking at the past”. If we extended our reading further by saying “The Hermit is using his lantern to see where he came from and get a sense of where he is going” we will need the ‘Purposes Are Destinations’ metaphor to reframe The Hermit’s actions as mental activity conducive to orientation as a goal. Just as a simple concept can be mapped into a single body experience, we also put all we know about several body experiences -seeing, walking, sorting physical obstacles- at the service of one more complex notion. Combining the ‘Understanding Is Seeing’ metaphor with the ‘Time Is Motion’ metaphor and the ‘Purposes Are Destinations’ metaphor is what will allow us to see a man who walks

with a cane and points a lantern to the left as letting our experience inform our actions.

Fill your head with attention.

This key corresponds to the head of the characters, or more precisely with their glances. By looking the character's head we will know if the figure is suggesting us to pay attention to the past (Left), the present (Straight Forward) or the future (Right). depending on the direction of the main character's head one single card will be saying to us "look back", "Look ahead", "focus on here and now"; but when we see more than one card in a sequence we can observe a 'head movement' that describes a change of focus, a redirection or even a persistence of attention.

Do what the images do, not what they say

is a direct allusion to observe the character's action without getting derailed by its alleged symbolic meaning. In The Moon card, for example, I have suggested that an absence of human figures suggests our physical absence. This will be a lot more useful than seeing The Moon as 'the mother archetype'. From a phenomenological perspective, night-time is dark and we have a set of experiential learnings that associate darkness with danger. But we also have an experience of the moon that gives us a sense of timing: we know that the darkness will only last a fortnight, and this is reinforced by the fact that after The Moon card we have The Sun card: daylight trumps night-time. Still, within itself, we can see the moon as full and regard all of our experiences about how this event occurs once a month. Here, a phenomenological observation of the image in itself is suggesting a different sense of time that we can, by transferring our literal experience into a metaphor, map into a feminine cycle if this is analogically sound. The moon is not a disembodied, abstract symbol, but an event we all have experienced. We don't need to read Clarissa Pinkola-Este's books to understand what The Moon means, we only need a window.

Sit passively, stand receptively and walk actively. Embody your destination.

In his extraordinary book 'From Molecule to Metaphor', Jerome Feldman points: "... the process of understanding through embodied simulation inherently involves a choice of perspective. The three basic alternatives are: agent (pushing), experiencer (being pushed) and observer (seeing third party)". A big part of what 'mirroring the tarot' means has to do with finding ourselves in the cards. We find three main body postures in the tarot: sitting, standing and walking. We possess experiential

information for these three states. Sitting is our most passive state after lying down (which is not depicted in the tarot). Just as the child that learns to stand, in our upright position we become 'an object among objects'. We are engaged with our surroundings but we aren't yet active. That is why I describe that state as 'receptive'. We gather information, we emit signals, but there is no definite sense of movement. Such movement will be the next step, defined as the actual action of walking. (There are other body postures defined in the tarot, like falling down in The Tower and kneeling down in The Star. Both of them imply one step beyond being standing still, and therefore they will be considered as active). Any of these three actions defines the 'destination' of our mind, our attitude expressed by our body. Mirroring the card would then imply mirroring that physical attitude, either at a literal or at a metaphorical level. For example, we have seen how The Fool walks forward, with his eyes fixed on the future. At a literal level this body posture could be mirrored by taking a walk, while at a metaphorical level we could talk about 'moving on' as a way to suggest we are forgetting an ex-lover. The important thing to reinforce here, that every single action in a character's posture can be seen as direct advice, with application that could be literal or metaphorical. Comparing the different body postures of the characters we see in a row of cards gives us a sense of sequential motion describing an evolution or change of action: going from a card that shows a character sitting down to a card that shows a character walking gives a clear indication of taking action, while the opposite would suggest we wait. At each level: head, body and hands, the characters are giving us direct pointers as to be, or how to act.

Duel with the sword, build with the wand, offer a cup, plant a coin.

Four elements conform the tarot's suits: swords, wands, cups and coins. We manipulate all of these elements with our hands. Both the use we have for them and the context in which we use them defines what they mean. Think for a moment about what would happen if a knight challenges another knight to a duel, and at the very last minute each warrior draws a cup instead of a sword. The whole event would get re-contextualized and the 'crossing' of cups will evoke in us a different set of multi-sensory references than those evoked by the crossing of swords. The sound of two cups clinking together, and all the memories it brings in all different sensory levels would be the meaning of the suit of Cups, just as the sound of two swords clashing, and all the scenes that sound brings up would be the meaning of the suit of swords. From this we can infer what is behind the phrase Let the hands show your intention. Someone who offers us a cup intends something very different from someone who points a sword at us or who gives us a coin. The hands of a character in a card show us what the character is doing, and since our experience of any object has an

emotional component implicit in our reading of the goal such an object will suggest we accomplish whatever a character is doing with his hands and tells us what it is the character is hoping to achieve.

Let the hands show your intention

Looking at a single card, the hands of a character give us specific ideas about the kind of action that it makes sense to imitate. Looking at several cards in a row, each action of the hands can be seen as steps in a movement sequence, revealing a more complex and complete intention. The transformation of an object held by a character into a different object would suggest a corresponding evolution or reinterpretation in our goals. A passive scepter that becomes a cane suggests action, just as a cup being poured, symmetrically transfixed into a person tied up, suggest stagnation.

Forget what red is and notice what is red,

is another reference to privileging experience over disembodied symbolism. It is our experience of red, as in blood rushing through our veins, what gives red its meaning. Since this verse, and the following five, are symmetrical, this line will mirror this other line in the poem: For what turns gold into lead also turns salt into sugar. Meaning, defined by our relationship with the world, is what differences a nugget if one metal god only to cast little soldiers from a nugget of another metal we treasure. We experience a certain kind of white dust as salty and another one as sweet. We know what 'salt' means because our taste buds remember that particular experience and can distinguish it from the experience associated with the word 'sugar'.

Stand on a number as you would on a hill

has symmetry with what one step fulfills another could encumber and both refer to using numbers sequentially and not symbolically. We learn to experience numbers through our fingers and we use that embodied knowledge to count. Counting can be both a quantitative act and a qualitative act. Two is more than one, which could imply that two defines a higher quantity than one, but also, that two is better than one if we are planning to venture into an unexplored cave, or one can be better than two if we got a last piece of cake and we are alone at home. Numbers define progressions that expand or contract. 'Standing' on a sequence of numbers suggest that, by orienting ourselves in space, numbers will point to us if we are advancing or retreating, moving 'up' or 'down'.

Strip down to your armor

has symmetry with what you wear wears you down. Both sentences invite us to read the progressive nakedness of the tarot characters as empowerment through transcendence of the material world. In the trump's sequence the characters start heavily dressed and start losing clothing as soon as the heavenly realm becomes more present. The message seems to be simple: the more we need to wear, the less powerful we are. We are limited by our status, social perceptions, roles and insecurities. A naked character becomes pure movement. At a secular level I would reframe that by saying that transcendence lies beyond our menial needs for status symbols, and flow is only achieved if we drop our vertical defenses. The flesh that cannot be pierced cannot be loved. A raised bridge cannot be crossed.

Know an image by its friends:

is an allusion to the very notion of symmetry. Any image has a 'friend' on another image that shares some of its visual or conceptual attributes. Some of these visual pairings are quite obvious, like The Lover and Judgement, or Temperance and The Star, some of them are conceptual in nature, like The Pope and The Devil, and therefore harder to grasp. Beyond that, the above set of keys suggest that all heads have symmetry with the other heads, all bodies have symmetry with other bodies, and all of the hands, and the object they hold, have symmetry with other hands and objects. Comparing and contrasting these symmetries is what gives us a narrative. But there are of course many other things that are symmetrical, like La Papesse's body and the building in The Tower. (By comparing the evolution of the crown from one image to the other, we get a message). The pillars in the Chariot's canopy are symmetrical to the trees in The Hanged Man, and the celestial body in The Sun has symmetry with The Hermit's lantern. In fact, if you fan the cards so you can see at once only half of all of them, you will discover countless symmetries. They aren't for me to point out but for you to discover.

All these keys suggest that we can draw a lot of information by approaching individual cards as actions and also by comparing how these actions evolve in a sequence of cards. In his book 'The Meaning of The Body' Mark Johnson tells us that "life and movement are intrinsically linked". Cognitive scientists talk about 'schemas' as conceptual structures we have for understanding experiences. All of the movement schemas we have learned through our life-experience and have been encoded in our brains are activated in response to our environment. Since our brain is, in a way, an self-regulating best-match seeker mechanism, this often happens below our conscious awareness. But the power these schemas have to bring forward memories, feelings, and physiological sensations is the very act of meaning-making. We don't

need to be told what things mean because we know, we have experienced them, not as abstract constructs but in real life. Mark Johnson also points out how, curiously, our interface gets erased in the act of perception: we don't feel our own body but these things our body is in contact with. That makes it very easy for us to overlook our own physicality as the foundation of meaning-making. That is why we can say: the deepest truths hide in the obvious.

The theory of embodied semantics proposes that "concepts are represented in the brain within the same sensory-motor circuitry in which the enactment of that concept relies". My contention is that, since the objective of perception is to inform our actions, and since the human brain seems to respond to still images implying motion as if these images were actually moving, describing images as actions is a shorter path to suggest an idea to the brain. This all sounds very complex when in truth it is very simple: while looking at the tarot we must work with what is there, in the image, because that is a symmetrical - or analogical - way of tapping into what is 'there' within the other person's experience. Describing a card automatically becomes a description of the person who is looking at the card. As I have already hinted when I mentioned mirror neurons, this model of thought argues that mental connections are in fact active neural connections. Of uttermost importance for my model is the idea, promoted by many cognitive experts, that the brain doesn't separate shape from meaning, and therefore, we must look at each card knowing that the action depicted in it shows in itself its own conceptual intention.

On the other hand 'intuitive insight' can be further understood to be analogical thinking, and as such, stripped of any vagueness or mysticism. Considered by many as our brain's best talent, analogical thinking is currently used by any student trying to solve new problems based on old lessons he read in a book, by lawyers who look for the right precedent for their cases, by researchers on artificial intelligence building computer models of neural connections, by scientists open to a 'Eureka! moment' or designers who seek inspiration in nature, by poets trying to say the same old things in new ways, and by anybody who uses their previous experience to face new challenges. Analogical thinking can also be seen as the root of magical thinking, as the sorcerer who aims to control nature by handling little bits of it. In that regard I would like to clarify that I am not proposing a causal relationship between a few random cards and a person's life as a magician would. Seeing something happening in the cards won't automatically make anything happen in real life. What I propose is that whatever can be pointed out in the card and taken as analogous to the person's life can inspire an action if we build up on the empathy that is established between the image and the person, so that the image becomes a suggestion. This concept lies at the heart of the model I am proposing.

Analogical thinking can be very useful in fostering creativity and proposing unexpected insights, but is not magic. Although our ability to map an analogy doesn't guarantee that the analogy is right, analogical thinking is our most effective tool when it comes to breaking away from 'here and now' to help us find alternative solutions to our problems. In working with the tarot, analogies have proved to be exceptionally useful at suggesting ideas. As Milton Erickson put it beautifully when speaking/writing about analogies in hypnosis:

"Because they can't reject the analogy; they can recognize the parallel. If you just talk about the problem they can refuse to recognize that. The analogy they have to recognize; they have to recognize the parallel. In doing so, they partially recognize the problem."

By understanding shape as meaning we can elicit an analogical response in a person. This form of advice taps into the person's experience without imposing an external frame of reference. We are using that person's experiential knowledge to define her coordinates and any possible course of action. Using the tarot's images to help a person remember those learnings – either explicit or implicit – that they already have, can help them cope with reality in their own terms. The main idea I want to propose here is that in a tarot reading we use images to talk to the brain in a suggestive way. To clarify our objective, we must strive to do this by the most direct means, and along the way getting rid of any superstitious procedure whose effect within the reading cannot be causally established.

In conclusion, a descriptive approach to the tarot, both historically sound and in tune with today's cognitive research should accomplish two things: first, by using medieval keys -quadriga exegesis and symmetry- to read the tarot as a medieval document we could reframe all the current notions about 'secret codes' and 'hidden mysteries' people associates to the tarot into a more sober understanding of what these images actually are. (As far as I know, acknowledging the quadriga exegesis as an useful reading schema for the tarot is something most serious historians do, but I have never seen the notion of medieval symmetry applied to the tarot before). Second, this approach should produce a more elegant model to think about the tarot, better suited to our contemporary understanding of how images affect us and what use we may have for that kind of aesthetic experience. This should help us dispense with the "How do you know the client's question?", "Do you look at their fingernails?" and all that nonsense which sadly defines the way in which most wannabe readers approach, or think about, tarot readings.

We now know enough about the brain to keep from using the psychic/paranormal understanding of the tarot. The supernatural is increasingly becoming an out-dated notion. If from a historical point of view the tarot was an amusing game, we can update that view to see tarot readings as cognitive play based on our brain's ability to engage in analogical thinking to recall its own embodied knowledge. That's how images work us.

Notes on the use of Indirect Suggestions in Tarot Readings

Here I have copied and commented some selected quotes from a paper titled: "Indirect Forms of Suggestion", by Milton H. Erickson (www.erickson-foundation.org) and Ernest L. Rossi (www.ernestrossi.com/ernestrossi). Some of the techniques used by Erickson may be of interest in regard of the use of metaphor in readings, and specifically, to the usefulness of describing a card to a client, this is, the convenience of using a tarot card as an object of fixation, as understood in hypnotherapy, so it can elicit the relevant imagery that would lead a client towards important insights. This places the use of tarot within the idea of "magic as the intentional use of symbols to engage the mind in a process of transformation."

For starters, let's see how Erickson (and Rossi) describe the stages of what constitutes an indirect suggestion:

(1) the fixation of attention, (2) depotentiating conscious sets and habitual frameworks, (3) unconscious search, (4) unconscious processes, and (5) hypnotic response. In essence, an indirect suggestion is regarded as one that initiates an unconscious search and facilitates unconscious processes within subjects so that they are usually somewhat surprised by their own response when they recognize it. More often than not, however, subjects do not even recognize the indirect suggestion as such and how their behavior was initiated and partially structured by it.

Now, let see at how that process can be applied to the experience of looking at a tarot card:

(1) Fixation of attention

The client is invited, either by gesture or by words, to focus on a given tarot card. The context in which the even occurs: a tarot session, and the fact that the card has been selected, either randomly or by conscious choice, gives personal relevance to this act of attention. The historical weight and long tradition tarot has ads credibility to the entire process.

(2) Depotentiating conscious sets and habitual frameworks

The tarot reader describes the card. He doesn't interpret the card, but he simply describes what is evident: situation, position of the character, general attitude, the events taking place... The card becomes a therapeutic metaphor, a story by itself, without direct reference to the client.

(3) Unconscious search

The client search for meaning, looking for analogical connections between the image that is being described and her own personal situation. This process is helped by the reader by means of indirect associations, truism, questions, the use of time, and a set of tools we will soon describe.

(4) Unconscious processes

Realizations, insights, feelings and emotions than in other context, or following a direct comment, question, or request, wouldn't have been accessed so easily, are elicited. The process occurs naturally and without resistance from the client's part. Most of this process won't be ever known by the tarot reader, It doesn't has to be. The client must be granted the choice of withholding information. Part of this process won't be even acknowledged by the client at a conscious level. At least, not at the precise moment of the reading.

(5) Hypnotic response.

A living metaphor evolves and expands itself with time, and takes special relevance when an specific event triggers it. In this way, each tarot card becomes a 'cognitive talisman' whose effect provides hints to the subconscious mind about how to respond to certain situations.

Now, allow me to expand in some of the specific strategies that help suggestions being given indirectly by quoting from Erickson and Rossi's paper:

1. Indirect Associative Focusing. The simplest indirect form of suggestion is to raise a relevant topic without directing it in any obvious manner at the subject. Erickson likes to point out that the easiest way to help patients talk about their mothers is to talk about your own mother. A natural indirect associative process is thereby set in motion within the patients that brings up apparently spontaneous associations about their mother.

This is exactly what takes place when one describes the situation depicted on any given card. We are opening a space for the client to do a transderivational search and find "herself in the card" by means of associations. I am not talking here about describing the meaning of the card, but describe the image in the card, as if one is showing it to the client.

Since Erickson does not directly ask about the patient's mother, the usual conscious sets and mental frameworks (e.g., psychological defenses) that such a direct question might evoke are bypassed. In a similar manner, when Erickson is working in a group, he will talk to one person about the hypnotic phenomena he wants another target person to experience. As he talks about hand levitation, hallucinatory sensations, or whatever, there is a natural process of ideomotor or ideosensory response that takes place within the target subject on an autonomous or unconscious level. Erickson utilizes these spontaneous and usually unrecognized internal responses to "prime" a target subject for hypnotic experience before the subject's resistance or limited beliefs about his or her own capacities can interfere.

An additional kind of description is the one that includes kinesthetic stimuli, as in describing the client the sensations that the character featured in the card seems to be experiencing: "having a cat scratching you 'there' certainly hurts, it has to make your skin sore... yet the man seems to be enjoying the breeze he feels on his face". This is, again, an indirect way of addressing sensations and emotions that may be relevant to the client at a metaphorical level.

Similarly, in therapy Erickson uses a process of indirectly focusing associations to help patients recognize a problem. He will make remarks, or tell stories about a network of topics S1, S2, S3, Sk, all of which have a common "focus" association, S 1, which Erickson hypothesizes to be a relevant aspect of the patient's problem.

In the context of our work with tarot, every storyline and metaphor we use gets automatically contextualized as being "about the client" by means of context and expectations.

The patient sometimes wonders why Erickson is making such interesting but apparently irrelevant conversation during the therapy hour. If S 1 is in fact a relevant aspect of the patient's problem, however, the patient will frequently find himself talking about it in a surprisingly revelatory manner. If Erickson guessed wrong and S 1 is not a relevant aspect, nothing is lost; the patient's

associative matrix simply will not add enough significant contributions to raise S 1 to a conscious and verbal level. In this case Erickson allows himself to be corrected and goes on to explore another associative matrix. This indirect associative focusing approach is the basic process in what Erickson calls the "Interspersal approach." (NOTE FROM EE: Obviously, there is nothing wrong about being wrong; but still, one can narrow down the topics into the most relevant one by asking the client to look at the cards and consciously pick one that feels relevant)."

2. Truisms Utilizing Ideodynamic Processes and Time. The basic unit of ideodynamic focusing is the truism, which is a simple statement of fact about behavior that the patient has experienced so often that it cannot be denied. In most of our case illustrations it will be found that the senior author frequently talks about certain psychophysiological processes or mental mechanisms as if he were simply describing objective facts to the patient (NOTE FROM EE: Change "psychophysiological processes" for the actions and attitudes depicted in the cards). Actually these verbal descriptions can function as indirect suggestions when they trip off ideodynamic responses from associations and learned patterns which already exist within patients as a repository of their life experience. The "generalized reality orientation" (Shor, 1959) usually maintains these subjective responses in appropriate check when we are engaged in ordinary conversation. When attention is fixed and focused in trance so that some of the limitations of the patient's habitual mental sets are depotentiated, however, the following truisms may actually trip off a literal and concrete experience of the suggested behavior.

You already know how to experience pleasant sensations like the warmth of the sun on your skin.

Everyone has had the experience of nodding their head yes or shaking it no even without quite realizing it.

It could be said that each Tarot card illustrates some sort of truism: "You know how one can be at the top and suddenly, find oneself at the very bottom" La Rove De Fortune; "You know how much more pleasant feels to travel light" in Le Mat. Or that the situation depicted in the card can be turned into a truism: "You know how it feels to loose your ground" in La Maison Diev.

Another important form is the truism that incorporates time. Erickson would rarely make a direct suggestion for a definite behavioral response without tempering it with a time variable that the patient's own system can define.

Sooner or later your hand is going to lift (eyes close, etc.).

Your headache (or whatever) will disappear as soon as your system is ready for it to leave.

Building on Erickson's examples, one could ask: "I wonder how long is going to take for that water to cool down", in Temperance; or "the pain of cutting all these limbs will recede with time" in XIII.

3. Questions that Focus, Suggest, and Reinforce. Recent research (Sternberg, 1975) indicates that when questioned the human brain continues an exhaustive search throughout its entire memory system on an unconscious level even after it has found an answer that is apparently satisfactory on a conscious level. The mind scans 30 items per second even when the person is unaware that the search is continuing. This unconscious search and activation of mental processes on an unconscious or autonomous level is the essence of Erickson's indirect approach, wherein he seeks to utilize a patient's unrecognized potentials to evoke hypnotic phenomena and therapeutic responses.

Think here on raising the question of why a character in a card is doing what he or she is doing, on wondering aloud about what kind of feelings the character may be entertaining in that situation/position: "One wonders how may feel that woman by letting go all that water" Lestoille.

Questions are of particular value as indirect forms of suggestion when they cannot be answered by the conscious mind. Such questions tend to activate unconscious processes and initiate the autonomous responses which are the essence of trance behavior. The following are illustrations of how a series of questions can focus attention to initiate trance, reinforce comfort, and lead to hypnotic responsiveness.

Would you like to find a spot you can look at comfortably?

As you continue looking at that spot, do your eyes get tired and have a tendency to blink?

Will they close all at once or flutter a bit first as some parts of your body begin to experience the comfort so characteristic of trance?

Does that comfort deepen as those eyes remain closed so you would rather not even try to open them?

And how soon will you forget about your eyes and begin nodding your head very slowly as you dream a pleasant dream?

This series begins with a question that requires conscious choice and volition on the part of the patient and ends with a question that can only be carried out by unconscious processes. An important feature of this approach is that it is failsafe in the sense that any failure to respond can be accepted as a valid and meaningful response to a question.

Following Erickson's example, one could describe a card like L'Empereur, by saying: "When one finds the right place, one can sit proud and relaxed... the spine feels like pulled from above, erect but relieved, so one can look at the rest of the world with gentleness, understanding and piety, since every face and every problem present to us as an epiphany." Here, we are anchoring the unconscious capacity to experience insight in the face of trouble, with the physical, tangible, sensation of sitting down with a straight back, just like L'Empereur suggests.

4. Implication. An understanding of how Erickson uses psychological implication can provide us with the clearest model of his indirect approach. Consider the following example of the multiple implications in a single sentence that seemingly states the obvious.

The very complexity of mental functioning, (A truism about psychology that initiates a "yes" or acceptance set for what follows.) you go into trance to find out (With a slight vocal emphasis on "to find out," this phrase implies the patient will go into trance and will go into trance to find something important). a whole lot of things you can do, (Implies that it is not what the therapist does but what the patient does that is important.) and they are so many more than you dreamed of. (Pause.) (The pause implies that the patient's unconscious may now make a search to explore potentials previously undreamed of. This sets up an important expectancy for experiencing unusual or hypnotic phenomena.)

Again, if we look at La Papesse, we could say: "Your memory guards only the events that truly matters (A truism) and whatever comes to mind when you look at the past

(suggest to make an act of remembrance and find something) can be transformed by you into knowledge (the person's own capacity to learn is what counts) and used in the present. (Pause, to allow the entire suggestion to sink-in).

It is important in formulating implications to realize that the therapist only provides a stimulus; the hypnotic aspect of psychological implications is created on an unconscious level by the listener. The most effective aspect of any suggestion is that which stirs the listener's own associations and mental processes into automatic action; it is this autonomous activity of the listener's own mental processes that creates hypnotic experience.

Although "Indirect Forms of Suggestion"* is a longer essay, these quotes and my respective comments should give you a detailed idea of the kind of work I am suggesting. The underlying idea here is that such patterns for indirect suggestion are present in all tarot readings, independently of the reader's awareness to them. What we commonly call a 'prediction' may very well be just the client's enactment of a post-session suggestion the reader implanted with or without knowing so. All readings share a common pace-and-leading structure in which the expression of a fact that is recognizable by the client automatically validates those who the client may not recognize yet but are projected into the future. While functioning in a pace-and-leading structure, the tarot becomes a tool for modeling behavior, even if we assume that we are just there to give our clients 'hope'. A conscious understanding of these techniques should reassess our responsibility as readers when delivering information to clients. By understanding the role that suggestion plays in our work with the tarot we can help the psychological processes that are an integral part of a reading to take place in a way that can be more controlled by the reader and therefore more useful to the client.

* For further study read 'Hypnotic Realities: The Induction of Clinical Hypnosis and Forms of Indirect Suggestion', by Milton H Erickson, M.D., Sheila I Rossi, Ernest L Rossi

Other suggested resources:

Milton Erickson's Contribution To Therapy, by Stephen Lankton (<http://lankton.com/epist.htm>)

My Voice Will Go With You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H. Erickson, M.D, by Sidney Rosen

Uncommon Therapy: The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton H. Erickson, M.D., by Jay Haley

eye rhymes \ˈvɪz-h-wəl-ˈpō-ə-trē\

noun

1: an attentive look

2: the hole through the head of a needle

3: a series of visual exchanges between two or more parties

verb

to discover or meet especially by chance

transitive verb

to flip or toss and compare exposed faces

Examples:

At first glance

LA LUNE-IUSTICE-LAMOREUX

I didn't write this poem. Chance did. Waste your time imagining that god's finger, Charles Bronson's ghost, or a goddess with green armpits is shuffling the images and you will be missing the most important invitation the tarot extends to us: we can make sense of chaos because we are full of meaning. Understanding this is fundamental to a fruitful relationship with the Tarot, because the meta-message in any tarot sequence, the first thing the images - these images, any images - have to tell us is that the riddle we solve on the table gives us the ability to solve one riddle in our lives. "Similia similibus curentur". An act of magic.

Why do I call this sequence of images a 'poem'? Because like a written poem, the tarot speaks the language of shape. Understanding is immediately present through a gestalt that is evident at first sight. It will be useful to read the tarot as we read any poem: by observing its accent, and rhythm. We need to let ourselves be taken into the poem's shape. I am still far from being convinced that the tarot's secret is none other than the fact that there is no secret. At least, no secret big enough to justify distrusting our own eyes. As painter Frank Stella would say: "what we see is what we see". Unable to concede that any of the proposed theories deploying a symbolic meaning for the whole trump series holds any truth, I prefer to focus on the unstable

nature of the format supporting these images: a deck of images, meant to be shuffled and randomly rearranged, always in a state of mutation. I can only approach such an unstable system by listening to chance. A few images become a temporary sub-system whose variables and correspondences I should notice, as artist Julian Schnabel would put it: "like props that signal each other to get you into some sort of state that's outside of them". Keep always in mind that such sub-systems will soon be lost within the chaotic dynamic of the whole, ever shuffling deck. In that dynamic the meanings will never be fixed. They will keep getting rusty, peeling off and showing new shades under the old, cracked ones. We must read chance's poem as a provisional event. We must be both the heavy-eyebrowed expert ready to trace all kinds of symbolic conjectures, and the kid over his shoulder shouting: "Look! Justice is mad because her guy went out." Today, these visual rhymes will 'hit' us one way, but it is very likely that they will spark a different light tomorrow. Images suggest more than what they mean. I would go so far as to say that each tarot image is an image looking to be turned into a metaphor when the viewer, based in her own experience, finds a referent for it. The image in the image isn't a metaphor, but it wants to be a metaphor. Since the referent always changes, meaning will always be transitory. It is said that a poem restores to its words their original meaning. I hope that, by reading the tarot as a poem, we could join painter Francesco Clemente in "trying to resurrect the experiences that are prior to symbolic representation."

Let shape lure us. Let us scan the sequence looking for eye-rhymes: forms and elements which wear a formal resemblance to one another. Just as the words 'fog', 'log', and 'dog' sound similar even if they represent totally different concepts, the moon in *La Lune*, and the angel in *Lamoureux*, rhyme. It is as if the moon's yellow-red rays, turned blue, had expanded so the angel could pop out. This rhyme evolves into an expansive rhythm, and such a rhythm is itself a message. The moon seems to be ignoring these dogs that bark at her, but the angel - whose blue face rhymes with the moon's face - aims at the man below. The rhyme progresses into a more tangible pronouncement with the celestial bodies depicted on these images. Let us keep looking. Could that man in *Lamoureux* be the lobster in *La Lune*? They rhyme too! Could he be the answer to these dog's prayers, now that in the final image they have turned into women? If two dogs find a lobster, who is entitled to eat it? Two dogs rhyme with two plates on a scale, and also with two women. A lobster rhymes with a sword, and also with a man. The active principle emerges to create balance by splitting reality in two. "Come and make sense of this mess. No one can choose but you." the images seem to say. Justice's face and the moon's face also rhyme, and Cupid wears Justice's blindfold, creating what in poetry is called an 'enjambement'. Then, we notice another rhyme: there are two yellow "stones" at *La Lune*'s bottom line, resonating with the moon's yellow halo. That virtual triangle rhymes with the one

created by lustice's crown and the two yellow lumps at her feet. As the rhythm progresses, we see how the same virtual triangle is created by the superior portion of Cupid's halo, which is also yellow, and the yellow triangles in the two women's dresses. A repetitive rhythm. Perhaps later you would like to see how the rest of the yellow fragments in these images also rhyme? Perhaps you would rather follow the rhymes on the red trail, or on the blue one?

Yellow may have a meaning. It is hard to tell because Rimbaud left it suspiciously out in his poem: "A Black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels, / I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins". The rhyme created by these portions of yellow suggest that the light in the sequence remains steady. None of these three images suggest visual movement. If any, the progression from La Lune to The Lover seems to indicate a zoom-in (from La Lune to lustice) and a immediate zoom out (From lustice to Lamoreux). Things won't be resolved, but they will become more pressing. The images take us right below the double sign at a crossroad. The deadline is getting closer. The contenders will reveal themselves, and if we pay attention to these little invitations which reality extends to us, we might get closer to knowing on whom to place our bets, Will we chose wisely? The images don't tell. The lover has emerged but he hasn't made his choice. "Yes" - you must be saying - "but, what do these three images together mean?" I don't know. It is hard to understand an answer without a question. Meaning is the hare we hit when we shoot at darkness, and if we hit no hare, then meaning will be a bush. It is the second before the touch hurts when our foot trips on a stone. The old tire in the fisherman's hook, full of surprised disappointment. All the things a kid carries in his pockets, things that are nothing, and everything. Meaning is whatever derails an image from recovering its memory. A fake mustache on a familiar face, a secret whispered in deaf ears. Above all, meaning is whatever wasn't meaning yesterday, whatever won't be meaning tomorrow. For me, here and now, these three images seem to be saying "Make yourself present! Face your choices!" which feels very relevant since there are as many good reasons to start doing this weekly exercise as there are good reasons to forget about it. But here I am. Since we can only explore the images' optical language in all its splendor by asking them questions, this is what I propose: send me one. Each week I will choose one question among the ones you send, and I will look at three images for an answer while 'thinking aloud'. I can then share my way of looking at the images with you.

Should I end my relationship with my lover?

LAMORT, LE CHARIOT, LESTOILLE

Poet Mary Oliver wrote: "You can fool a lot of yourself but you can't fool the soul. That worrier."

Every time La Mort appears on the table, people ask: "Does that mean death? Am I going to die?" And I reply: "Well, it depends. Do you feel like dying more than usual today? Because if you don't, then you aren't."

Look at our question. Look at these three images. Do we really need an explanation here? Looking at the images is knowing the answer. "Cut, leave, drop it" the three images seem to say.

Let us look for eye-rhymes. The first thing that catches our eye is the fact that the skeleton in La Mort rhymes with the woman in Lestoille. Try to visualize their two flesh-colored shapes: the contraction from La Mort's flesh-colored shape to Lestoille's flesh-colored shape defines a falling rhyme. This becomes totally evident if we look at the character's backs. There is a progressive curve. The blue in the skeleton's pelvis becomes the blue of Lestoille's horizon. They also rhyme, and their rhyme works to stabilize the image. Notice how his yellow shoulder becomes the yellow jars in Lestoille. That strong yellow shoulder, carrying the dynamic of all that severing action, breaks down into two yellow jars that are less determined, more resigned. Arms rhyme with arms. We can see how a message emerges. Not only do the skeleton's arms rhyme with the woman's arms, but they also reinforce the falling rhyme.

What is a 'falling rhyme'? Poet Inayat Khan wrote: "A poet who brings his heart into a condition which allows him to, so to speak, swim in the ocean of divine wisdom will naturally move his arms in rhythm. It is not that he expressed poetry in rhythm, but that he receives knowledge in rhythm". This notion of knowledge delivered in the form of rhythm alludes to the use of rhyme as a technique for activating memory, but also to the emotional impact, at a level that bypasses conscious awareness, that the poetic cadence has on the human soul. We look, we feel, we know. In the tarot, as in music, feeling a rhythm is getting it. I refer affectionately to this first rhythmic reaction to a group of cards as a "reptilian" feeling. A rhythm in a row or three or more images can go three ways: it rises up, it falls down, or it remains constant. Hence the idea of rising, falling and sustained rhythms. These upward, downward, and steady movements are in themselves a message. Shape becomes meaning. Things might move up, things might settle down, or things might stay the same. It is all about finding where the accent stands in the progression. Going deeper into the images simply means elaborating on the details of such a message.

In our current example, the three images suggest a theme of detachment and loss. There is a clear indication of cutting off and letting go, but both halves of that process seem to be interrupted by the chariot's rigid silhouette. If the first image invites us to cut, and the last image invites us to let it go, the image in the middle feels like an interruption. It suggests the need to leave. Space - and its brother: time - will be necessary for this process of separation to be complete. The images seem to be saying: "let the wound breathe for a while before healing it." Within the context of our question, the meaning of death gets expanded and redefined, instantaneously. The language of shape speaks before our mouths can articulate a single word. Depending on our question, La Mort could be the Grim Reaper, or a stripper doing her garden. Context - provided both by the question and by the rest of the images in the sequence - tells us which one it is.

Underlying our conscious awareness of all the eye rhymes we can possibly find, our mind searches for meaning by reaching into each image's semantic field. We link the image back to the original context in which we usually experience it. Everything belongs to a semantic field. Since meaning is linked to experience, everything we know is known within the boundaries of the context that gives it meaning. A hammer is linked to the field of tools and manual work. It is within that context that we can understand it. A chair is understood within the field of furniture. It is within that context that we learned to relate to it. In the tarot, each image exists within the semantic field of its own history, but also, its different components refer to different semantic fields. In our example, the skeleton handling a scythe is labeled as death because it belongs to the semantic field of medieval literature and art, where the image can be found, functioning, as death. But if, along with the skeleton, the scythe belongs to the semantic field of death, it also belongs to the semantic field of agriculture. It is a tool used to cut the crops. In a way, we could say that each image has different properties, and that these properties become active or inactive through the relationship created between the three images when we look at them together. The semantic properties of each image get redefined when their semantic fields overlap. In this case, we pay special attention to the way the figure's arms (rather than legs) rhyme, because it is through this rhyme that the specific details in the images, those which concern our specific question, are activated. The eye rhyme indicates what is resonating between the images. The skeleton's arms activate the woman's arms, or vice versa. Faced with a question like "Should I end my relationship with my lover?" the 'cutting' property of La Mort, derived from the scythe's agricultural semantic field and activated by the woman's jars, becomes more dominant than the "funerary" property of the skeleton, because that attribute doesn't rhyme with any other figure in the three images.

La Mort is also the best example of how a cognitive dissonance can expand our understanding of things. A cognitive dissonance occurs when an image's semantic context doesn't fit into any of the categories our brain uses to store information. This collision leave us with a choice: either we make the image fit our cognitive structure, or we expand that structure to embrace the image. In this example, La Mort's semantic field ties the image to the Grim Reaper, but the question gives this image a frame of reference which excludes the idea of physical death. So, in our search for meaning, the image forces us to expand our understanding of death. This dynamic makes us focus on the semantic context of two very prominent elements in the image: the scythe, and the skeleton. A scythe exists to cut, and that is what makes sense in this case. To cut. Sever the relationship. All this is expressed in a very threatening way by the unsettling figure of the skeleton, a figure without flesh which reminds us that there are no more meaty parts to soften the pain caused by the relationship.

On occasion the tarot's message will be more elusive than in our present example, and the exercise of consciously finding the eye rhymes will be appropriate. Other times, as in today's example, we will be able to trust our mind's knowledge of meaning. We have traveled the semantic fields of most of these images, and we owe it to ourselves to explore the semantic field of those we aren't familiar with. Knowing is feeding the mind with references. The images then become familiar faces. Just as we can tell what's going on at a dinner party just by looking at the guests' attitudes and faces, so we will be able to discern the tarot's message at a glance.

Should I change my job?

7 DESPEE, VALET DESPEE, 8 DE BATONS

Let's forget - I say forget, not throw away - our numerology and Neo-platonism. Let's even forget that there are trumps and pips and court images, or that the pips are divided into four suits. Let's accept shape's invitation. Have you noticed how the 2 of Cups rhymes with La Maison Dieu? Or how Le Monde rhymes with the whole suit of Swords and the suit of Swords rhymes with half of the Devil? Look! The central pile in the 9 of cups was hiding behind the floral ornament on the six of cups, and that ornament rhymes with the flowers in the two of wands. Have you noticed how every cup is waiting for a coin to fecundate it, how swords expand while wands contract, how one image of wands beside one image of swords gives us a pumping heart, or how cups spread vertically while coins spread horizontally? If we forget that there are 'majors' and 'minors', and we forget of all that's 'rational', like the four virtues, the four strata in Medieval society, the four elements, or the four corners of the world, we can

then see expansion, contraction, rhyme and resonance, and we will see the way the Marseille tarot speaks to us in a language of the most diverse sounds, launching us into a sensory overload of symbols in which we find each image in the other 77 and also find ourselves in each image. Learn the Marseille tarot's optical language and I promise that, at least, you will save a bunch of money in drugs and spirits!

This week's example comes from my personal practice. The first thing I noticed about these three images was the rhyme between the sword in the seven of swords and the sword the valet is holding. The sequence felt like an act of retrieval, as if the valet simply took back his sword, previously stuck in the lower section of the elliptical structure we see on seven of swords. I then noticed another rhyme: that gray intersection of woven scimitars where the red sword is stuck rhymes with the center of the woven wands in the eight of wands. If the first image shows the sword stabbing an organism, the last image shows that wound closing down after the sword has been pulled out by the valet of swords. The message in the images was puzzling: "you need to go back and heal a wound from your past". What did that have to do with career, and more precisely, with my client's question?

I didn't know. But since that was what I got from the images, I told her so.

She looked at the images for a few seconds and told me that the reason why she choose her career 10 years ago was to show her father that she could manage to survive without his financial support. "He cut me off, so I chose the highest paying career I could, and I have thrived financially, but I simply hate it. Besides, my father died a year ago."

Can you see how relevant the message was? The death of this person's father rendered her career meaningless because the whole point of her career was to impress her father and she had no one to impress anymore. For this person, changing jobs would be a healing act. Thanks to this unexpected message we were able to talk about how it was time for her to retrace her steps and find a kind of job she could feel passionate about. A kind of job she would choose for the right reasons, not to get back at her father. And we could only talk about this because the images gave me a message that had seemingly nothing to do with work, or career!

That is the way the Marseille tarot's optical language works. We use chance to create poetic patterns, the patterns elicit meaning, and that meaning elicit thought-processes in us as some sort of music for our eyes. When rhythm becomes certainty and we are moved we find the insight we wouldn't have found by logical means. Poetry's mission is to take our mind away from our usual patterns of thought, until we

find what we weren't looking for but which will anyhow remedy our sense of being lost.

There are two main things we can learn from this. First, that we don't have to know why we see what we see, but we do have to know what we are seeing. I had a client once - not the same one - who told me "if you see something irrelevant in the images, tell me about it too." I found that puzzling, but after thinking about it, it made so much sense! We know our images, but we don't know the person sitting in front of us. Why would we decide what is relevant and what isn't? Divination has to be a dialogue.

But the most important thing I want to point out here concerns what is perceived as the most problematic aspect of the Marseille tarot: reading the pips, also known as the 'minor arcana'. In the last century we have seen how the absurd idea of the pips being "non-illustrated" has been propagated all across the tarot world. This is simply nonsense. The pips don't depict human figures, but they are certainly full of discernible elements: cups, swords, wands, coins, flowers, leaves... We can look at the pips in exactly the same way we look at the trumps, or the court images. We will only appreciate the true beauty of the Marseille tarot's optical language when we allow ourselves to look at all of the 78 images with the same level of attention.

Why are my boyfriend and I arguing so much?

9 DE SPEES, 10 DE SPEES, ROYNE DE BATONS, 7 DE COUPES

"We came out of darkness. No, we entered - out there is dark, here we can see something through the smoke, the smoky light, perhaps from candles, but we can see the colors, yellows, blues, over the white, over the table, color dashes, red, also green, with black contours, drawings in white rectangles spread over the table. There are wands, entangled branches, trunks, leaves, just like before, out there. Swords that send their blows from the leaves, ambushes in the darkness where we were lost. Fortunately we saw a light at the end, a door, there are coins that shine, cups, these tables with glasses and dishes, bowls with steaming soup, bottles of wine, we are saved but we are still half-dead from fear, we can tell, we would have to tell, each one of us would like to tell what have happened, what we have seen with our very own eyes, in the dark, in the silence. Here there is noise. How can make myself heard?...

... What can I do to tell that I have lost my voice, my words, perhaps also my memory, what can I do to remember what was out there, and once I remember it, how can I

find the words to tell about it?... ... Fortunately there are some images here, a pack of the commonest tarot, de Marseille, they say, but also called de Bergamo, or Neapolitan, Piedmontese, call them what you like...

...We all reach at once for these images on the table. Some of the figures, set aside the other ones, bring back to our memories the story that brought me here". These opening paragraphs of Italo Calvino "The Tavern of the Crossed Destinies" are the perfect analogy for the experience of the tarot. A person comes to us because they have lost their words. They will never say it like that, but that is basically it. They have forgotten how to talk about a problem, or about themselves. Perhaps they simply haven't yet found the right words to talk about their future. We may have forgotten their future and need a few cue words to remember it. We give them our images so they can use them to tell us their story, and we look at these images to find some words we can give back to them. Do you know how important is to have words? In a great article about his experience giving poetry workshops to inmates in some State penitentiaries, Miller Williams reflects on how vital this is: "and they come to realize, some of them, that if they had been able to command the language they were born to and on which virtually all effective communication depends, they might not have been where they were."

We all need to find the words that will keep us away from darkness. We even need words to define darkness, so it isn't dark anymore.

The words we give back to a person who seeks insight from the images come from our experience of the tarot. Tapping in the essence of each image is a wordless event, or perhaps, an event beyond words. But in order to make the tarot useful for someone else besides us, we have to find a way to say things for which there are no words:

The moment you master something, but you aren't ready to take credit.

The moment you take your eyes away from the page and stare at the empty space.

The moment you know that all you have accomplished won't suffice.

The moment you hold your pants up

The moment you let someone else do the thinking.

The moment you don't know.

The moment you think you know, and go for it without holding back.

The moment you realize you know as much as you don't know, but you can't tell the difference.

The moment you retrace your steps by feeling instead of thinking.

The moment you know it is all just a moment.

The moment you struggle between what you have learned and what you have been told.

The moment you laugh after nailing yourself into a cross.

The moment you follow your wounds.

The moment you find comfort in the smallest tasks.

The moment wrong feels right.

The moment you wish you never prayed for a miracle.

The moment you win by surrendering.

The moment your words fail you.

The moment you find your words in other person's ear.

The moment you remember what was dead.

The moment your mind moves on.

The moment your body follows it.

Those are my provisional words for the trumps (For those of you who may haven't noticed, the fool is at the end). But if these words come from looking at the images - both in real life, and in a mental dimension where I go to escape from darkness and the dentist - they are only provisional. Faced with a specific sequence of images, and a specific question, they are useless. We must always find new words.

We see this week's images and we can see the couple arguing about the way the sword in the Nine of Swords gets divided in two in the Ten of Swords. What once was one strong sword is now two weak ones, two voices disagreeing, parting ways. We can tell this woman wants to marry and her boyfriend may not be ready. She wants a wedding. We can say that because the Queen of Wands is looking melancholic at the Seven of Cups. She looks forward to a celebration, but she looks at it alone. A good message from the images shouldn't just answer a question, but raise a few more. How soon does she want to marry? Why? Is he ready? Will he ever be? We can ask, and we can give the person our images as an invitation to speak to us through images, to come out of darkness, so we can find some more words in the colors and black contours of these drawings in white rectangles spread over the table.

Will I get the promotion?

VIII DE DENIERS, III DE COUPPES, IIII DESPEES

Poet Robert Frost was convinced that a person without training in the use of metaphor shouldn't be left out on the street. In Frost's view the metaphor-illiterate are not fit for normal life! So, let's guarantee our right to free transit by saying this: the best way to

understand the pips on the Marseille tarot would be by tossing a feather on the ground.

Have you ever let a feather go?

When we let a feather fall it could do so by plummeting to the ground in a straight line, or it could fall in a slow zigzag. It could draw a long spiral while falling, or retreat awkwardly behind our feet. In any case it will describe a pattern, and if that's our purpose, we could see in that pattern a metaphor for the future. Any movement can be seen as a metaphor for fate. In the same way, three pips together describe a pattern that is very much like the one a feather traces while falling down. We may lose sight of this if we pursue our obsession for seeing astrological references, imageinal points, elements or numerological meanings in them.

Robert Frost based his theory of poetics in what he defined as "The sound of sense... ..is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound, pure form. One who concerns himself with it more than the subject is an artist." In a way he was set to do in his poetry what we are aiming to do with the tarot: to find an spiritual dimension in what is everyday, by letting form 'speak'. I wish we could be half as successful as Frost was! This week our question is being answered by three pip images: 8 de Deniers, 3 de Coupes, 4 Despees. Since they have the flavor of consonant letters it may be hard to make sense of their sound at first sight. It would be completely natural to feel lost at first, and to miss our vowels, the trumps, which could immediately provide sense and focus to the sequence by incorporating an obvious human element.

But if the sound of the pips may be more primal, it is not devoid of message. This is the true language of shape in its purest form. Just as we can be moved by a song chanted in a foreign language, we can feel an answer in these three pips. Is my belief that the tarot should accomplish the same things poetry does: it should take our mind outside our usual thought-patterns, and give us words to talk about our problems, or to talk about our future. The pips become a poetic object as soon as they provide a structure for our thoughts to resonate with that field of lost images we have buried in our memory. The first thing we see in these three images is a falling rhythm reinforced by the fact that the whole progression is contracting. Our tower of eight coins decreases into a little three cups pyramid, and then, it gets further reduced into one flower. If we look for eye rhymes we see how the floral ornament in the 3 de Coupes becomes the four crossed scimitars in the 4 Despees. It almost feels as if that vine closes down to embrace the cup, and since the cup in the 3 de Coupes resonates with the flower in the 4 Despees, we start seeing a message becoming clearer and clearer: "if the focus is right, change will flourish".

The progression talks about decanting. We go from eight coins to one flower, which implies a very demanding selection process. The whole sequence looks like a tournament draw with semifinals, a final and a winner. In this case, a falling rhythm talks about things becoming less ethereal and more tangible. A pattern of contraction talks about things becoming more solid. Finally, the eye rhymes reinforce for a third time what the falling rhythm and the contraction patterns are suggesting: the time is right. But rarely do the images give us a plain answer without also giving us something to think about. The 3 de Coupes issues a warning: "play by the rules. Don't use your influences to get on top of your competition". What else could these two cups be saying, seeing how, in despair, the upper cup calls upon her friend, the vine, to push her further up?

Art can make us better people, but even so, the work of Picasso, Matisse, Klimt, Van Gogh, Kokoshka, Schiele, the whole Bauhaus and the Expressionists didn't prevent World War II from happening. The tarot can help us to find our direction, but it is far from infallible. It is always good to remember that patterns aren't facts. And since this week Frost has been my leit motiv, I will end this exercise by quoting him again:

"We dance around in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows."

Will my wife recover from her two hip replacements?

III DE DENIERS, X DE BATONS, VI DE BATONS

Artist Barnett Newman said: "One thing I am involved about painting is that the painting should give a man a sense of place: that he knows he is there, so he is aware of himself". In today's world, when painting has to compete with television, paintings have become enormous. Contemporary paintings have become whole sensory experiences that work as Newman says, by becoming telluric forces that have the viewer aware of participating in a natural event. The work of Julian Schnabel, Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer or Lucien Freud come to mind. The image-makers of today are repeating the gesture of their peers who, centuries ago, created cathedrals for us to immerse ourselves in them. But, just as mystic and physicist Robert Fludd said that, "each flower on earth resonates with a star in the sky", I would like to think that there is a cathedral inside of us ready to resonate with certain images and materials from the external world. These images always have an expansive effect. This way, a little voice could detonate an inner explosion. I find such a little voice in the tarot. To the pips we

can apply the advice of the 17th Century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho: "learn about pines from the pines and about bamboo from the bamboo". That is the way it works. It is in listening to the pips that we will hear the pip's voice. Everything is a voice. Everything, anything, can talk to us and have us moving, or shifting our awareness. The images have been shuffled for centuries, and today they come to us because we are willing to listen to them. Looking at them as if we were listening with our eyes will connect us with the imaginal structures existing within ourselves. The ones we call 'memory'. When we look at the tarot we respond to it with our own imagery. The characters in the images will come to inhabit the building of our memory. The images aren't images, but experiences. "Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul", philosopher Nicolás Malebranche wrote. I can only agree, since in looking at the tarot we are illuminating our inner cathedral.

Experiencing a cathedral can be dizzying. Especially when we realize that we carry the cathedral within us. Standing before us, the tarot creates a way to live inside us. This way it becomes an internal event. The tarot should help us fall back in love with our own story; when this is not an option, it should help us fall in love with ourselves in spite of our own story. We will know that the tarot is inhabiting us when we feel like the tower depicted in La Maison Dieu. When our crown falls down and we see each meteorite falling like an angel, that is: when the images set the analogical capacity of our minds in motion. Look at this week's images: III de Deniers, X de Batons, VI de Batons. Chance carves a flute for us to make it sound. All sequences of images are a magic spell, and this one invites us to drop our crutches when the time is right. The images evoke a language that goes beyond the literal, and in doing so they have our thoughts moving beyond the literal, too. By tracing new, unexpected, relationships between two objects, metaphors create new thoughts, and new thoughts create new possibilities.

That's how we can see these two new hips in the two symmetric coins of the III de Deniers. They are keeping the whole composition of the image in balance. The fact that we see the hips 'in place' doesn't say anything in answer to our question. It only acknowledges the question by allowing us to see in the images what has been voiced as a concern. It is when we look at the expansive rhythm created by the X and the VI de Batons that we can start to feel more positive about the whole issue. The descent from ten to six suggests a softening of tissue, a process of recovering: muscles go back to normal. Each sequence of images flirts with us, inviting us to look as if we have never seen it before. This way we can discover in the images' rhythm, rhyme and shape: the intimacy of metaphor. A metaphor is always like those double armchairs in which two lovers sit facing one another. In the experience of the tarot we sit tight facing chance so it can whisper a secret in our ears. Can you hear it? Can you look at

how the two vertical wands in the X de Batons vanish in the VI de Batons, making room for two joyful flowers? There we have our crutches being dropped, and with it, our answer.

Where am I heading?

LE MONDE, ROY DE BASTONS, ACE DE BASTONS

In "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction", Wallace Stevens wrote:

"A poet should abstract himself from the layers of interpretation which have piled up over the years on objects in the external world. He must throw out, for example, what science, mythology, theology and philosophy tell him about the sun and see the sun as the first man saw it for the first time..."

Then he remarks:

"Nothing must come between him and the sun when he gives himself to the act of looking at it and seeing it in its being".

"Giving ourselves to the act of looking". What a powerful idea in a world like ours, where undivided attention had become such a rare treat! I love the passion Stevens implies we should feel for what we see. A passion he equates with a first encounter. There is nothing like a first encounter! The act of looking must always be a primal act, a beginning for everything. Each day we must look at the images as if we are encountering them for the very first time. Every day the images present themselves to us here and now, within a set of unique circumstances, so, a question like "where am I heading?" becomes our only frame of reference, our only reality. And what do we find when we look at this week's images?

The first thing calling our attention is a sense of 'zooming-in'. The images present us with a contraction, a progressive cleansing of all secondary detail, in which the only element present in each single one of these three images - the scepter - grows increasingly large, until it occupies the whole format in the Ace of Batons. That's it. One single eye-rhyme carrying all the narrative weight of the sequence. These images are talking about giving ourselves away to the 'experience of a branch', so no lion, no bull, no angel or eagle, no throne, crown or solid ground can take our attention away from that branch. And the polished scepter held by the woman in Le Monde, that element that becomes too big in the Roy de Bastons for us to simply hold passively,

becomes alive and sprouts a leaf in the Ace of Batons. This gesture is important. Our learnings and our intellect tell us that Le Monde is an important image, and a King is an important image, and we should be 'paying our respect' to these images by analyzing them in full. But as soon as we forbid these abstractions from coming across the pure act of seeing, and throwing away "what science, mythology, theology and philosophy" tell us about Le Monde, or the King, we see how the only relevant detail in all these images, the only thing we need from them, is that wand, that scepter wanting to come alive. Right there we will simply know what the images are saying: "Use what you've got. Focus! Focus! Focus, until you are your own fire, until your passion becomes key and keyhole, door and doorway, at once."

When should I ask my friend for money?

LE SOLEIL, LA MAISON DIEU, LE BATELEUR

"To pay attention to the line is not to suggest that a poem exists on the page. It doesn't. A poem comes into existence when the imagination of a writer and the imagination of a reader confront each other inside an act of language. The writer and the reader bring to a confrontation different imaginations structured by different associations. The poem in print is the ground on which the meeting takes place."

Can you see how well this quote from Miller Williams extrapolates to the experience of the tarot? Our images are that meeting ground in which our imagination and the imagination of a person will celebrate an encounter. This week's question asks for a prediction, and predictions are a peculiar thing. There is nothing in the meeting of two minds that can offer us a peek into what hasn't happened, but a meeting of minds is always a fertile soil for suggesting a future. I have a very particular view about predictions. I find predictions very useful, but I don't think for a second that I can see into the future. Predictions are a form of suggestion, and suggestions are a form of sculpture. The voice modifies the space that receives it. When I deliver a prediction, I know that I am implanting a suggestion to provide the person's mind with some coordinates for manifesting its own will. A prediction can be a permission to fail or a permission to succeed, depending on the intention and level of awareness of the diviner. A diviner who is unaware of the suggestive power of predictions might implant a negative idea in the client's mind, deceiving himself into thinking "that's what the images are saying"; while a diviner acting in awareness of his own responsibility can turn the worst omen into a prescription for empowerment.

When a person, as in this case, asks “when is the best day to do something?” we must understand her question as “when is the best day to make something happen?” We have the means to look at the images and define a most propitious day, but by doing so we aren’t describing a future event, we are suggesting a future event, because we are aware that, as Miller Williams wrote: “suggestion always triggers the imagination; description almost never does”. A prediction of this kind becomes a purposeful way for us to direct the person’s attention to a specific goal within a specific time-frame. By telling a person “the best day would be Tuesday”, for example, we are suggesting that she should gather all her strength on that day, to raise her awareness that day, to focus all her will that day, and to sharpen her senses that day. In other words, we are providing her with the mindset to be a knife only at the precise moment of cutting. And what makes Tuesday more propitious than any other day? Well, it would be precisely that strength, that awareness, that will, that sharpness of the senses we are helping the person to elicit. The best day is the day we believe to be the best day. The prediction simply allows us to put all our faith and intent on one specific date. A prediction creates a state of mind which increases the person’s chances of succeeding. Predictions are a snake eating its own tail, or perhaps, a snake eating its own tale!

Some people may have trouble understanding this. Divination belongs to the realm of myth-making, and myth-making is at odds with the materialistic attitude of Western culture, because materialism needs to turn myth into fact before it can accept it as useful. That is the tragedy of spirituality in Western civilization. I would like to think that diviners are keepers of myths, bound to protect myths from being taken literally.

Back to our question of discovering when is something going to happen, we must see our image sequence as a time-line going from left/past to right/future. We must also understand that the graphic composition of the images can suggest a forward movement (as in *Le Fov*, *Le Pape*, *Force*, *Le Chariot*, *Le Jugement*, *Le Soleil*, *La Maison Dieu*, *La Rove de Fortune*, *Le Monde*) or a backwards movement (as in *Temperance*, *La Papesse*, *L’Ermite*, *La Mort*, *Le Bateleur*, *Lestaille*) or they may suggest stagnation (as in *Le Empereur*, *la Lune*, *Lamoureux*, *LEmperatrice*, *Le Pendu*, *Iustice* and *le Diable*). By establishing what kinds of images we have in our sequence we will know if things are going to move forward, experience a regression, or remain unchanged. That way, we can have an idea if something is going to happen early in our time-line, or later on. It is all encrypted in our language of shape.

In our current example, we can assign a specific time-frame to our three-image sequence. Let’s say our three images represent a weekday time, from Monday through Friday. *Le Soleil* will represent the beginning of the week, *La Maison Dieu* will

represent the middle of the week, and Le Bateleur would represent the end of the week. Le Soleil will then refer to Monday/Tuesday, La Maison Dieu will refer to Wednesday, and Le Bateleur would refer to Thursday/Friday. In objective terms – that is, as objective as the tarot can be – the most positive, forward-oriented image in our sequence is Le Soleil. Monday seems to be the most propitious day of the week. There is another promising sign we can find here: Le Bateleur is holding a coin in his right hand. Our questioner will have her money by the end of the week. The language of shape speaks very directly. But if these may be the facts, the images are also warning us about the circumstances surrounding this event. As I said at the beginning, the images are saying more than simply when she'll have her money.

The week starts with Le Soleil. We can see an agreement among friends. That is what gives us our positive omen, so we can suggest Monday as the best day to ask our friend for money. But when we look for eye-rhymes we discover that these two friends in Le Soleil rhyme with the two people in La Maison Dieu. The sequence isn't promising, since the rhythm is, literally, a falling one. If in Le Soleil these friends look eye-to-eye, in la Maison Dieu they fall out. An additional eye-rhyme are the suns in Le Soleil and La Maison Dieu. The rhythm shows a receding sun, reinforcing a progressive loss of clarity. As an outcome, Le Bateleur present us with a lonely friend who, coin in hand, looks back at what can be perceived as a shattered friendship. As an afterthought, that coin in Le Bateleur's hand seems like a little sun, a diminished reminiscence of the original sun shining over the two embracing friends we see in Le Soleil. "The money you will receive could cost you a friend" the images seem to be saying.

Paraphrasing Edward Hirsch: "the wisdom lives in the eye and the images remember everything."

Would my daughter get a good teacher next year?

ACE DE BASTONS, ROY DE COUPPE, ROY DE BASTON, VI DE COUPPES

My best friend's son is four years old. Last weekend he went down with 'flu and asked vehemently for just one thing: to wear his Spiderman costume. As soon as he got the costume on, his symptoms disappeared. It reminded me of an episode in the life of Japanese Zen poet Taigu Ryokan, when some kids asked him to draw on their kites some words to make them fly. Ryokan – whose life could be perfectly seen as an enactment of the tarot's Fool – drew in their kites the symbols for HEAVEN-UP-BIG-WIND. What else does a kite need to fly? The episode also reminded me that I once

killed a mouse with a poem: "In the kitchen surrounded/By glue traps and venom/
Just like me/We have a mouse". I wrote that poem one night and the next day the mouse was both poisoned and glued to a trap. The poem was that bad! Neither the poem nor the event were pretty, but they serve to engross my anecdotal file of cases in which the power of symbol seemed to affect reality. That thing we call 'magic'. Let's look at this week's images as if they were a Haiku: A branch is taken off the tree. An old man becomes young. A separation. Haikus are the embodiment of Zen because they exist 'here and now', and that is also how our images exist at first glance: here, in front of us; now, in this precise moment, defined by the question we are being asked and the relationship between ourselves and our querent.

We have two sets of inter-woven eye-rhymes: Bastons rhyme with Bastons in a way that suggests creative power being refined, and Coupes rhyme with Coupes, in a way that suggests someone being placed in a new environment. The entanglement between the two narratives created by the eye-rhymes reinforces a sense of the whole class being shuffled around. At one level, the images resonate with the anxiety (big or little) the daughter may be feeling about starting a new year with new classmates. The shift from the Roy de Coupes to the Roy de Bastons, from old to young, suggest she was emotionally settled in the former group, and now she may feel that she has to start over again. The VI de Coupes shows her class being separated. Half will go to one class, the other half will go to another. But the sequence starts with the Ace de Bastons, and that Baston gets refined in the Roy de Bastons. For me, this will be a year in which she will explore and expand her creativity, even when she may be upset by being separated from a few friends. Does she like to write? The Roy de Bastons is very literal in depicting that. But it doesn't have to be writing. In the Ace, the baston points up and it is open. In the Roy, the Baston points downwards and has been sharpened. Change will be useful to refine what is raw.

She will be put under the tutelage of a creative teacher. The Roy de Coupes, always flirting, suggest this may have been a last minute decision. While the narrative defined by the Coupes acknowledges the anxiety caused by a change of class, creating the space in the reading for your daughter to vent, the narrative created by the Bastons is there to give strength and purpose to such change. That raw wand we see at the beginning will be crafted into a scepter in the Roy de Bastons. It is an acknowledgement of your daughter's creative potential. A potential she will be invited to polish and perfect this year. That flaming Baston will be her 'Spiderman costume', her HEAVEN-UP-BIG-WIND. The symbol she needs to fly.

Which city is the most auspicious for our meeting: Madrid, San Francisco, or Tokyo?

LA MAISON DIEU, JUSTICE, THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

The tarot can be very useful when we are trying to choose among several options. To do so we must simply pull one image for each option, and let the analogies between images and events speak to us. As long as we are clear about which image represents what, the answers will quickly become evident.

In this case, La Maison Dieu would stand for Madrid, Justice would represent San Francisco and The Wheel of Fortune will represent Tokyo. We don't look at the sequence created by the images, rather we pay attention to the main feeling each image transmits. Going back to last week's idea about the images being a 'visual sermon', we can see how each of them expresses a very distinct idea with complete eloquence. When we compare these feelings we will see how some images feel better than others and this way we can establish the most likely option.

In our example, La Maison Dieu is certainly the less positive image in that it visually depicts a sense of collapse. No matter how we rationalize the meaning or content of this image it simply doesn't look good. The success of a meeting consists in crafting a good communication between the people who will attend, and there is nothing in La Maison Dieu's image that would be consistent with that idea. Again, we are talking about a pure 'visual feeling' here. If we put ourselves in our client's shoes we will see how unlikely it would be for them to look at that image and feel a legitimate sense of hope or relief. And this is very important because, as a 'visual sermon', each image carries a set of very specific suggestions. Each image 'talks' about specific things. When we acknowledge these suggestions we build a powerful, coherent, reading. When we decide to play all kinds of semantic games in our politically correct obsession about 'never see anything negative in the images', and we go against the image's suggestions, we build up a reading that will be regarded as inconsistent by our client, either at a conscious or unconscious level.

We can confidently disimage Madrid as an option. Choosing between the other two images might be harder. Tokyo is represented by The Wheel of Fortune and San Francisco is represented by Justice. There is nothing evidently negative in these two images. Both seem to be better options than Madrid. Tokyo is described by The Wheel of Fortune as a good place to start a conversation, but not to finish it. Things will be spinning too fast to focus. If the purpose of this meeting is to start certain processes, then Tokyo feels like a perfect place for it to take place. When we compare

this with Justice, we immediately see how much more centered and focused, how much more effective this image is. Justice is a image of rulings and decisions. Between San Francisco and Tokyo, San Francisco seems to be the better option for a meeting whose objective would be to settle matters.

As usual, it will be up to the person to decide. In any case, our little exercise may provide enough analogical information for the most likely scenario to resonate with our client in a clear way. Looking at some images is equivalent to examining our own mind, as it were, spread over a table. In this way, our 'ghosts' become tangible images, and our capacity to apprehend and comprehend them gives us the soothing sense of what is possible.

PUBLIC COURSES

Marseilles Seekers Course

FIRST EXERCISE

Dear friends,

I don't have many things to share, but I hope you will find the few I do have useful. During the next six weeks I hope to cover the basic aspects of what can be described as the Marseilles tarot's optical language: its rhyme, rhythm, resonance and optical patterns. We will do this by means of six practical exercises which will be accompanied by a theoretical frame of reference. The theoretical frame of reference for each weekly exercise will be found on my web site, under the "Eye Rhyme" section. But you don't need to send me questions. You only need to read these short essays and then work on the exercise I will pose you here on AT. You should post your response to the exercise under the same thread in which I posted the exercise and we will then work through some feedback. All questions are welcome and I am more than happy to answer them to the best of my ability.

You will notice that I make lots of references to artists, writers and poets. If the Marseilles tarot is the tarot of the image-makers, then it is within the realm of the image makers that I find the answers I am looking for. For example, since I see a tarot reading as an act of visual poetry, it is by studying poetry that I have arrived at an understanding of the tarot. If you aren't familiar with some of these names, and Wikipedia isn't responding, please ask me about these authors and I will be more than happy to tell you about them.

Our first exercise might be the most problematic one, not in terms of its difficulty, but in terms of some of the conclusions I hope to arrive at after we work on it. Today I will post the exercise and tomorrow I will post the first little essay in my Eye Rhyme project. In this specific case, it will be better if you do the exercise first, and read the essay afterwards.

The exercise is very simple, but please read through these instructions a couple of times to make sure you know what to do before you do the exercise. So, shuffle your whole deck and place it face down on a table. Put your hand over the deck and travel down in your imagination through a specific numbers of cards. Choose any number that comes to your mind. (If for example you decide to travel 20 cards down the deck, focus on that 20th card from top to bottom). You won't know which card this is. I won't

know which card it is. And that is fantastic! I would like you then to describe the feelings that come to mind while you are focused on that unknown card. Please, don't try to describe the card, but only the feelings that come to your mind while you focus on it. Write it all down. After you have written it down, go through the deck and look at that card. I want you to then write down your initial reaction on seeing the card. After seeing that card, and when your initial reaction has faded away, I want you to find all possible relationships between the feelings you experienced while focusing on the unknown card, and the imagery in the card.

That's it. It is that simple.

Please, report back.

Have fun,

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The main point of this exercise is to make us familiar with the principle of analogy. The tarot is an analogical machine. Any card, or any sequence of cards, can be linked to our personal experience by analogy. The important thing here is for us to have a frame of reference. In this case, we had all these feelings we experienced before actually looking at the card. In some cases, our frame of reference will be a question. In some others, our frame of reference will be our mind state. Our client also brings her mind state to the table, and her mind will draw analogies between whatever we say, or whatever she looks at in the cards, and her mind state. A non-theoretical approach at the cards will always produce analogical meaning.

Our frame of reference is what tell us what to look for. Are we asking about an inheritance? Then the 5 of deniers will tell us that two sides are still disputing a small part of the state. Are we asking if our cousin Jean will find a man? Here the 5 of deniers will tell us that she is surrounded by married couples. Any advance here will be trouble! Are we asking about the results of our biopsy? The 5 of deniers will suggest that certain cells are growing.

Obviously, if we were to answer the same questions by looking at the four of denier, the answers will be different. Could you ... try to do it?

- What is going on with the inheritance?

- Will my cousin Jean find a man?

- How do the results of my biopsy look?

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There is something especially great about the pips: they are the only set of cards in the tarot whose order isn't disputable. They are arranged in progressive order from 1 to 10. We can argue about the order of the trumps, and we can argue even more about the order of the court cards. But the pips present themselves in an order we understand at an experiential level, because we have ten fingers, and we have organized the experience of counting around this physical feature of ours.

The tarot is a tridimensional object. It is not a painting, nor a drawing. Physically, it exist in a continuous rearrangement. It is only at an intellectual level that it exist in perfect order. This is very useful when we are looking at a pip card because each pip completes itself in the next card of its series. The 4 of deniers looks more hieratic if we compare it with the 5 of deniers than if we look at it by itself. It also sounds lower than the 5 of deniers (and louder than the 3 of deniers). When we get to know our cards, which is not a matter of trying but a matter of doing, we can recall the change of shape occurring from one card to the next one.

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Two very important things that I hope to point out through this exercise are:

- To pay attention to the images in the cards, without distinctions between trumps, honors and pips. Any card will 'talk' to you. By means of the impressions you elicit while focusing on an unknown card I am hoping for you to try to find yourselves in the card, once you look at it. Every time we look at some cards we try to find ourselves in them, by means of a question or a concern.

- To generate an impression that manifest prior to verbal reasoning. This is the key for poetical reasoning. We look, and we get the essence of something, even if -at first- we can't put it into words. There is a generalized tendency now about teaching to read poetry by saying: "read the poem and paraphrase it to know what it is about" this is a horrible thing to do. As poet Miller Williams would say, poetry is what you left out when you paraphrase the poem. Rhythm, rhyme, pattern, shape, color, sound, are experiential events first, verbal notions second. Rhythm, rhyme, pattern, shape, color,

sound are the poem, just as they are the message in our cards. Learning how to put an experiential feeling into words may take time. The important thing is that we allow ourselves to elicit experiential feelings, or impressions. This becomes a lot easier if we are consciously aware of our frame of reference. Every time we look at the cards we are somehow repeating this exercise, for every time we look at the cards we are hoping to recognize our question or concern in the images we have in front of us.

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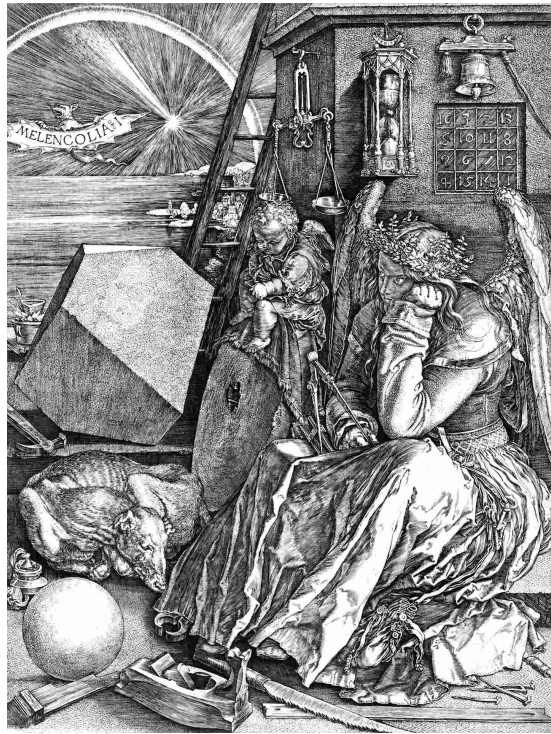
Sometimes we are doing a reading, the cards are on the table, and the person is talking. She may be employing words that are very similar to what you just said. In these occasions, we scan the cards, trying to recognize the client, and her words, on them.

A card like Le Pendu, la Maison Dieu, etc, have a very particular quality: they only feel right if we look twice. At first glance Le Pendu feels horrible, tortured, punished, hanging there. We have all experienced the horrified gasp our clients let out when this cards pops out. It is only when we look again than we see his playful tongue. I think it is important to respond to both feelings. It is important to experience what is in front of us. It is often said that pain isn't caused by the events we experience but by our opinion of them. This may be true, but a positive outlook is also an opinion.

There is something important about generating an experiential feeling from the cards, and it has to do with the fact that we tend to believe art is appreciated at a subjective level. This is a very recent idea, as recent as the late 19th-20th Century. I suspect the idea doesn't holds any truth when it comes to the tarot. Not only because -by the time when the tarot was printed- image makers worked with very specific communicational intentions, but also because of these initial gut feeling about the tarot imagery. It is very unlikely that you will find a person who will jump in happiness by looking at Le Pendu, just as it is very unlikely that someone will be moved by the cheerful disposition of Albert Durer's "Melancholy":

Look at that image. How many of you would chose it to illustrate the invitation to your birthday party? :-)

I would like to think that, by looking at the cards, we aren't just allowing our subjectivity to take over, but are are truthfully tapping into each image's original intention. It is just that we don't do it at an intellectual level, by means of a rational approach to iconography, history, etc. We do it as Francesco Clemente suggests in here:



"An analogical chain is a way of seeing images without skepticism. I accept all images as material that can be used to make other images. We live in the time of the fragment. The Cubists left us nothing but fragments. I piece them back together without any worry about how it was before the image was broken apart."

Contrary to what some people think, we will never rationally know what the people in Medieval times thought. But we can feel what they felt, by engaging with their images at an experiential level.

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In the meantime, I wanted to propose to all of you who completed the exercise, a new exercise.

Lets try to put into practice the ideas expressed in my two first 'Eye-Rhyme' essays. Please, place three cards at random on a horizontal row and:

- Try to describe the first experiential feeling the cards elicit in you as soon as you look at them. This doesn't have to be elaborate. A word, or a few words, will suffice.
- Define if the sequence follows a raising, falling, or steady rhythm.

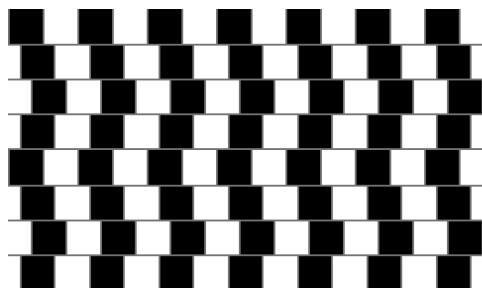
- Try to detect as many eye rhymes as you can.

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You will notice that all our pips can be reversed. Even so, I personally don't use reversals. I find they distract me from looking at the eye-rhymes. Besides, I actually look at the whole card sequence upside down, since I like my cards to face the person I am reading for. Just as we see all these things in the cards, the client sees things too! Adding reversals to that mix will make things very confusing. The other thing is that, since I don't assign any predetermined meaning to each card, but let the meaning be defined by context, there is no actual concept to "reverse".

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As you may have noticed, there is no right or wrong in this exercise, just as there is no right or wrong in a reading. What we have are levels of success with the revelations we obtain from the cards. I believe the Tarot is an irresistible illusion. It is irresistible because even if we are consciously aware of it being an illusion, the illusion entraps us. Look at this:



There you will find several optical illusions. If you look into any of these illusions you will see the illusory movement that is being proposed even if you are consciously aware of the experience being illusory. The tarot isn't an optical illusion, but a cognitive one. It works because it operates under the coordinates of the human mind, and the human mind cannot accept randomness. Our mind searches for patterns, connections and analogies in everything it touches. So, the cards will always be telling us: "this is how the universe acknowledges YOU..."

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We must decant the whole set of rational conceptions we have into a feeling, or an emotion, that expresses what the client is feeling. This is what I mean by going back to that point before the image turned into symbol. Symbols are dead metaphors. We

need to make them become alive. But that also implies the need to take responsibility for our own metaphors. That synesthetic process you are describing is ours to make, and we must take full responsibility for it. We won't be telling a client certain things because a book we read says that the 6 of coupes means so and so, but because we are seeing these things here and now in a unique moment.

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I can see you are all realizing how different is the actual act of finding yourselves in the card, and the act of putting it into words. Looking at the Chevalier de Bastons while reading your words, it all makes so much sense! Very often it happens to me that I can clearly see something in the cards, and I know how it feels, but as easy as it is for me to know that, it is very hard to put it into words. That's why I always feel words are provisional.

So far we haven't concerned ourselves with how to turn these feelings into a message. We will work on that in some of the following exercises. So far, what is important is for you to open yourself to the idea of looking at the cards as independent events, whose meaning is self-contained.

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In each case we have seen how the tarot's illusion makes it possible to fit all of our impressions into the cards we randomly choose. This is an extreme way of showing that the elicitation of spontaneous meaning is as "right" as any set of predefined meanings. At the same time we have seen, and I mean, actually SEEN a single card, without distinguishing if it was a trump, a pip, or a court card. There is a lot so look at in each one of the 78 cards in the deck, all of them being already illustrated, and with enough narrative elements for us to craft our metaphors. We shouldn't 'fear' any cards more than others.

Personally, I can only understand the cards in a group or storyline, with the meaning of each specific card being reshaped by its context. This first exercise, sort of a warm-up, would be the only one in which we will focus on a single card. From now on we will work with them in sequences.

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There is a concept anthropologists use to talk about the way African diviners look at the small elements/figurines in their baskets (not that all African diviners use divination baskets, but among those who do use them). The concept is 'micro-dramatics'. Micro-dramatics stand for the relationships that can be established among each one of these elements when they are cast, so the closeness, the separation, the angle in which they fall, creates a story.

The idea of 'micro-dramatics' is very useful when we look at the pips. We use it also when we put two or more cards together, and we stop looking the sequence as cardA+cardB+cardC, and we see it as a whole ABC. In our work with the pips we pay attention to the way the elements in the card (these are almost always an element or elements that define the suit, plus a floral ornament) are 'interacting'.

That is what you are doing here when you see the coins as people, and then, you see 5 of them as belonging to an order, while the other two are still on the outside. Then, we can almost see the floral element taking life: embracing, protecting and also ruling these five coins. Just as you projected your impressions into that micro drama, while reading for another person we can detect the micro drama and understand it as an analogy of that person's situation.

Both the Noblet and the Jodo-Camoin present a very similar 7 de Deniers. The main difference being that the Noblet is 'upside down', this is, the two coins that remain outside the floral element's embrace are at the bottom of the card. In that case, the foundations are even shakier. :-)

Something important I feel I should mention is that both Tchalai Unger and Philippe Camoin explore the optical language of the cards in a similar way as this, the main difference being that in their view, the resonance and rhyme of elements among cards reveals secret knowledge, as if each element, each line, dot, stroke in the cards was conceived with some specific significance, and by looking for patterns we activate this knowledge. I don't see it like that. I find it hard to believe that the upper left leaf in the Jodo-Camoin 7 of deniers has 15 black strokes inside because 15 is Le Diable, and the leaf is luring the two coins, or because Mary Magdalene was 15 when she joined Jesus. But I find very safe to see a micro-drama evolving in the whole composition, as long as I remember that such micro-drama will be activated in a certain specific analogy by the person I am reading the cards for.

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The main issue here is intention. I have problems with the idea of each image in the tarot being made with a secret intention. I find the idea of the tarot being made by enlightened masters too romantic. We don't know who conceived the trumps, but we do know that the tarot was made by artisans. Having a background in art myself, I am interested in the fact that these artisans were masters of their craft, and although this may be problematic for some, it is my suggestion that craft is what moves the human soul. What makes us feel God's immensity as soon as we enter a cathedral is the architecture, architecture being a form of manipulation. All arts are a form of manipulation whose aim is to compose emotional states. The artisan doesn't accomplish that by means of occult knowledge, but with the very understanding of how to work with shape that defines his craft. The ideas I am sharing with you here are tied to Unger and Camoin's ideas, but more precisely, to Matteo María Boiardo's poem "I Truifi", and with Teófilo Folengo's "Merlini Cocai's Sonnets". In the work of these two poets we have what could be the earliest historical account mentioning the use of Tarot for a purpose other than card playing, described as an analogical game. In this game, a group of people will contrast their personalities and situations with the character depicted in the card they got. A more contemporary link to this can be found in Italo Calvino's "The Castle of the Crosses Destinies", a book that I suggest everybody following this thread should read. (In his book, Calvino accomplished something I am aiming for you to accomplish in here. Something that Boiardo, Folengo, Unger and Camoin left conveniently aside, this is, an understanding of the pips as equally visual as the Trumps). As poets, Boiardo, Folengo and Calvino were able to understand the evocative quality of the trumps. As poet Robert Creeley wrote: "For a poet these details are profound masteries in themselves and speak as emphatically as will the evident content one otherwise calls 'the meaning.'" In my opinion, the drama of the tarot is that we went from Boiardo, who was a poet, to Etteilla, who was a hairdresser. Please understand here that I am totally biased about this. I feel that the idea of 'occult' knowledge always functions as a pyramid scam, with those who seek the occult knowledge at the base, the initiated in the middle, and the 'master' at the top. The problem being that on top of the master there seems to always be a forgery. I am totally biased against bad myth-making because bad myth-making is the opposite of art. For me, bad myth-making is the one that needs to be taken as truth to function. Art doesn't need its metaphors to be taken as fact to have power. "A myth that only works if it is taken as fact" can also be the definition of a lie. I prefer not to compromise myself pleading alliance to any secret school proposing any set of defined meanings. I don't look for meaning in the cards. I look for meaning in life, and in the tarot I detect messages. In the following weeks we will see how a message is what speaks to us first. Instead of chasing the occult, I prefer to go back to Robert Creeley, who wrote: "one knows all too well that what's to be said has only its own occasion", because in my view, the experience of tarot is never about the tarot,

but about the person who is looking at it. In fact, it is possible to say that by reading the tarot the tarot reads us.

Now, I would like to recapitulate. So far, we have seen how there are two things we do in order to detect a message in the cards:

- Follow the poetic patterns
- Recall the image's semantic field

In my work, I focus on the first of these two aspects because it is there where I feel that I can make a worthwhile contribution. It is in the realm of tarot as a poetic event that I have something to share. The second aspect is equally important, but I feel there are other people already focusing on that with success. Understanding the Marseilles tarot's semantic field implies going back to that point in time before the 'occultists' discovered the tarot, (a point in time before the Golden Dawn legend reshaped our understanding of the tarot to the point of making us wrongly believe they were the main source of knowledge about the cards). But this is also a point in time when the Court de Gébelin, Papus and Etteila weren't relevant. We need to go further back. To understand the Marseilles tarot's semantic field we must become familiar with the art and culture of late Medieval Europe, and other writers have already commented on this extensively.

Jean-Michel David comes to mind. His online course aims at providing a comprehensive understanding of the card's iconography and the cultural influences that may have helped to shape them. Then there is Michael Hurst, whose sober essays I deeply enjoy, and there is of course the always-controversial Michael Dummett. The fact that Dummett's objective point of view has ruffled so many feathers is very telling. As another poet who prefers to remain unnamed once told me: "Everybody wants to make the tarot his bitch!"

In any case, what I need to point out before going further is that I do not believe in the idea of "not reading any books on the tarot". I do think, however, that the dogmatism of the 'occult' authors is useless, and at worst, bad myth-making. But is not possible to have a truthful comprehension of the Marseilles tarot without considering it as an artistic document, tied to the real-world of the post-medieval/renaissance era, and not to the occultist's micro-cosmos.

That said, I would like to advance an idea some of you might find problematic: a thorough understanding of the Marseilles tarot iconography won't necessarily make us good readers. To say that a reading is not a class on the tarot would be too

obvious. The key is to understand that the purpose of a reading is to help a person reach a kind of knowledge they won't have access to by logical means, a knowledge that goes beyond the literal understanding of the cards and beyond their allegorical religious agenda. Such knowledge is reached by tapping into the card's anagogical level, and this occurs when both our semantic field and the card's semantic field overlap, generating a kind of meaning that is bigger than the combination of these two things: in other words, a revelation. Such a revelation occurs when we find what wasn't there before, and it can't be traced back to our personal semantic field, that is, to the context of what we know because we have experienced it. Nor can this revelation be traced back to the tarot's semantic field, that is, to the way the images on the cards can be found functioning in the art and literature of its time, or in the way the individual elements conforming each image can be found functioning within that culture.

For example, to point out Le Soleil and state that the two people in there are Cosmas and Damian, although very interesting, may be useless. At a literal level we can only speculate if they are Cosmas and Damian, a depiction of Gemini, or Laverne & Shirley. Besides, the tale of the two mischievous saints who traveled around, switching the rotten limbs of European patients for the healthy ones of moors cadavers may be too big to fit in our client's pocket, and too heavy to carry around just for the sake of it. The tarot makes us better people because by studying it we get to learn about all kind of things, including the curious life of Cosmas and Damian. But knowing these things won't make us better readers if we insist on believing that finding meaning in the cards consists of repeating on cue the tales we have learned. Using a tale for therapeutic purposes and doing divination aren't the same thing.

We must be responsible for our own metaphors. We must make divination the moment in which we help a person find new meaning. This is an act of poesis in which a revelation appears in front of us expanding our understanding of reality, the tarot and life. That's what we do when we look at the cards: we let them reveal their original intention at an imaginal level. We must learn all we can about Le Soleil. We must learn about Gemini, Cosmas and Damian, the masculine and feminine principles, the House of Children and Pleasure, or the Hebrew letter Kaph so we can do an act of amnesia. Then we will look at Le Soleil and feel that nothing is obscure, everything is clear, radiant, nothing stands between these two characters and they are embracing, finding their voices in each other's ears. This is an alchemical process in which we take all our rationality and all our words and then decant them into a feeling, into a simple certainty, so we can look at few cards and say "look, this person is experiencing this." Many of us could write the biography of our father, delving into his personality, preferences, particularities and more relevant anecdotes. But that is

not what experiencing 'father' is. Experiencing father means to feel in that presence, or in an embrace, the certainty of being safe. That is the difference between the poet and the historians. For a historian, a father is certain man of a certain age who lived at certain address and knew certain people. For a poet, a father is the feeling of being safe. Historians hunts the facts about things, while poets trace back the essence of a thing to that very moment before it became a symbol.

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The basic idea here is this:

OBJECTIVE OBSERVATION PROMPTS INTUITIVE INSIGHT

We observe, looking for eye rhymes and visual rhythms without projecting our intellectual understanding of the symbols on the cards, and once we have detected all these poetic patterns we allow an all-encompassing idea to label the essence of what we are seeing.

It is important not to start projecting meaning in each symbol, or we stop looking. We are trained to not seeing, but to being told what is in there to see. As soon as we think we know what an image is about we stop paying attention. That is why it is so important to detect all eye rhymes before trying to detect a message.

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SECOND EXERCISE

Hello All,

Our second exercise is about paying attention. It will consist on looking at three cards together and answering the following questions:

What did you notice?

What did you hear?

What did you admire?

What astonished you?

What would you like to see again?

What was most tender?

What was most wonderful?

What did you think was happening?

The first question "What did you notice?" is the place where you can write down all the eye rhymes you see in your cards. The rest of the questions intend for you to renew your attention once you have run out of eye rhymes, so you can keep looking at the cards for more things to notice.

As an example, I got Le Bateleur, Lempereur, La Maison Dieu

Here are my answers:

What did you notice?

I notice two people who refuse to look at each other in the eye, and I notice how they end up holding onto the same thing (the ground) after the tower collapses. I notice the cards telling me: "sometimes it is a good thing that bad things happen". I notice how we have a stand-up-sit-down-stand-up rhythm. Le Bataleur stands, Lempereur sits, the tower in La Maison Dieu stands again. But I also notice how both Le Bateleur and Lempereur have their hats on, while the tower in La Maison Dieu is losing it. I

notice how Le Bateleur's 'wand' rhymes with Lempereur's scepter, and the scepter rhymes with the tower in La Maison Dieu, reminding us that sleight of hand, ruling, and building a house can all be tuned into a spiritual exercise. I also notice how Le Bateleur's 'wand' is as broken as the building we see in La Maison Dieu. Only Lempereur's scepter remains whole. I notice how Le Bateleur's right hand rhymes with Lempereur's right hand, but while Le Bateleur finds security in holding onto a coin, Lempereur knows that he will be safer by holding onto his pants. Their hands also rhyme with the hands of these two characters we see in La Maison Dieu. We can see how the hands in these three cards conform to a falling rhyme: coin, belt, ground. Perhaps our two characters need a cataclysm to understand that the soil is the ultimate safety net. I notice Le Bateleur looking toward the past, while Lempereur looks toward the future, or toward La Maison Dieu, as if he is the only one among them both who can foresee the impending catastrophe.

What did you hear?

I hear the silence of Le Bateleur and Lempereur, who prefer to let the voice of thunder speak in La Maison Dieu than use their own voices.

What did you admire?

I admire the calmness of Lempereur, who will let Le Bateleur come around by himself, even when he can see the tower is collapsing not too far away.

What astonished you?

The way power gets progressively reformulated in the sequence. Three kinds of magic are being shown there: personal, social and universal. Le Bateleur trusts in the power of his sleights. Sleight of hand suggests the power one has over oneself. Lempereur trusts the power of his scepter, a symbol suggesting the power a man has over his fellow men. Finally, that flame in La Maison Dieu sprouts like a little flower. Having it reaching the sun suggests its trust in the power of nature. Nature may very well have been the first religion, and its creatures and events the perfect followers, for no animal wonders if what it perceives is reality or illusion, the rain does not second guess itself.

What would you like to see again?

I would like to see again that moment in which Le Bateleur lost his precious coin among the many ones falling from the sky in La Maison Dieu. That moment in which

he understood that his little truth was as valuable as many other little truths - and equally tiny. I would also like to see that moment in which Lempereur understood that Le Bateleur can only learn that lesson for himself, although that doesn't mean he will learn it alone. Hail is coming.

What was most tender?

That flower of fire that comes from within the tower with is fleshy fire calling for his dad.

What was most wonderful?

If these two pay attention, both of them will get to learn their half of the same lesson.

What did you think was happening?

A young person feels ripe and ready, but no one comes to harvest her. She is only seeing the small picture. In her, depression takes the form of resentment. An older person can see the whole picture: "the fact that you feel ready doesn't mean the world is ready for you." But the old person would talk and the young person would listen. That won't be a problem. What cannot be expressed in words will be expressed in actions when they discover together that opinions are made of clay, and that no matter how much fire we give to them, they will crash as soon as we fall down. Sometimes two people need to have the ground lifted from under their feet to find a common ground.

Have fun!

Additionally I have posted a new essay on the Eye Rhyme section of my site.

I also set a blog where you can find the previous essays. The link is on my site.

Any comment/question on the new essay is more than welcome.

I am looking forward to your answers!

Best,

EE

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The 'eye rhymes' notion comes from poetry. This is from Wikipedia: "Eye rhyme, also called visual rhyme and sight rhyme, is a similarity in spelling between words that are pronounced differently and hence, not an auditory rhyme. An example is the pair slaughter and laughter". I understood how the term applied to the tarot by looking one day at Temperance and Le Bateleur while researching about the language of the birds. The notion that two words with a similar sound can be exchanged to create a play of words, this is, the idea of two words sharing a similar shape can be used interchangeably for amusement or communicative purposes, lead me to think that if the tarot's shape isn't auditive but visual many images have a similar "sound" that can be appreciated at plain sight. They are rhymes for the eye. I saw that for the first time in Temperance and Le Bateleur, in the form their posture, arms, heads, hats, etc, rhyme. Then I read Luc Bigé's "Petit dictionnaire en langue des Oiseaux: Prénoms, Pathologies et Quelques Autres", where he talks about looking at letters to find analogies (The letter A is a person walking with his legs wide open, the letter B is a pregnant woman). Bigé proposes a list of meanings for each letter and several words. Although they were interesting, I found the idea limited. We can only speculate about how the language of the birds really functioned, so, I decided to establish a working concept for language of the birds (not definitive, not closed to revision) based on the idea of privileging shape over meaning that gives us a language of the birds functioning by detecting similar shapes in the letters of a word, a sentence, or in the images of a sequence of cards as a way to activate new meaning in them.

As I wrote in the article about language of the birds that is on my site, I have seen two main descriptions for this language: verbal puns, and visual puns. Interestingly, in his book "A Poet's Guide to Poetry" Mary Kinzie proposes a 'timeline' for poetic tropes, this is, a scale of rhetoric devices, in which she situates Literal Symbols at one extreme and verbal puns at the other one. Literal Symbols are those symbols that can represent something else without stopping being themselves, all at once. The images from a Lenormand deck are perfect examples of this. We see a key, and that key may represent 'a solution' or 'a way out', but it never stops being a key. Clouds are concerns and clouds at once, that is, the symbolic meaning never totally takes over the image. I propose that tarot cards work as Literal Symbols. We can see a wound in the 8 of Batons, or we can see our mother in Justice, without these cards stopping being what they are. Justice is Justice, who today happens to look like my mother, but the idea of 'mother' never takes over completely. Kinzie suggests that this would be the simplest, most direct form of poetic representation, while a verbal pun will be conceptual in nature, and therefore the most abstract form of poetic representation. I

find it intriguing to think that, perhaps, the language of the birds could operate in both ends of the spectrum, but this is just my own speculation.

Another thing I feel it is important to mention is that the purpose of looking at the cards in this way is to get visions. We see things that weren't there before. Revelations. Looking at the tarot in this way is about taking a detour to find a straight answer. Here is a quote from my lecture notes:

"There is a verse from medieval times, attributed to Nicholas de Lyra, which accounts for the four levels in which a text could be interpreted: "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia", this is: "The letter teaches the actions, the allegory teaches what you believe, the moral teaches you how you act, and the anagogy teaches where you are going." As a comment from Medieval Christian Europe, these four levels of interpretation must be acknowledged in Tarot. For the purpose of this lecture we will focus on the last level, the anagogical, as the one which "teaches you where you are going."

Anagogical comes from Anagoge, this is: "The mystical interpretation of a text beyond the literal, allegorical or moral sense. " Anagoge stands for that moment when the invisible is declared by means of a visible fact. In Tarot's case we can see how looking at the cards as tangible events prompts in us a revelation. It is by means of that revelation that our possibilities as human beings become clear. I suggest that such epiphany is a cognitive process which happens by means of our analogical thinking, and it is under that hypothesis that my understanding of Tarot evolves."

This process is the opposite of a recipe in which we say to a client: "well, you got two pounds of coins, one of swords, no cups. Forget about finding a boyfriend, but at least you will be rich, this is, if you can bear all the arguing."

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Before I start giving feedback on your exercises I would like to give you a few pointers.

- We don't know what a single card means, nor do we need to worry about that. Next week we will talk about my suspicion of what each card elicits, but that will always be a provisional idea, useless in the context of a reading.
- We can only understand a card by contrasting it with the other ones in a sequence.

- Trumps, pips and court cards are all part of a whole. Trumps and court cards aren't more 'valuable' than pips, but they may provide focus to our narrative since they depict human characters.
- The cards of a sequence don't depict separate events. We read the whole sequence as one single sentence/idea. As a sequence/storyline we understand the cards going from past-left to future-right, but it is all part of one single motion.
- As a consequence of the previous points, we don't base our first glance on the card's attributes, suits, or numerological values of the pips.
- First we look for a general rhythm: raising, falling, constant. Then we look for rhymes.
- The only thing relevant in a single card is what rhymes with other cards. Rhymes define the active attributes of each card in a given sequence. We ignore the passive attributes.

That's it.

Personally I prefer to look at three cards, four maximum (this is an idea I have seen expressed by Paul Marteau, Jodorowsky, Tchalai Unger, Italo Calvino and Philippe Camoin: if the character in a card is looking outside of the spread, I place a new card in front of him/her to know what she/he is looking at and to close the spread.). More cards than that and I start feeling confused. I don't work with spreads because, as I pointed out before, there is no intrinsic meaning in each specific card, nor in its position.

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There is something I want to point out. Ideally, we should see just one whole rhythm, composed by the three cards. Not each card as a separate rhythm.

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There are two ways of seeing: we can actively project our vision like torpedoes over the image, or we can become receptive with our eyes. This is a way of looking that is similar to hearing. Hearing is always receptive. To experience a poem we have to listen to it. Even if we are reading it, we must read it aloud so we can listen to its shape. In the same way we need to listen to the tarot's shape, and we accomplish that by listening with our eyes.

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I tend to see wands as the sound of a piano, or a pipe organ. A sustained progressive sound in which no key is released, but new keys are added up. Cups feel more like voices, human voices, a chorus. And swords are an expansive sound, like the sound of a flute or a trumpet. The sound expands even when the center, the source of it, is empty.

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Couppes equal cups
Batons equal wands
Espees equal swords
Deniers equal coins

I think it is easier to name them in English. When I am reading in Spanish I name them in Spanish, and when I am reading in English, I name them in English. That way the person I am reading for - which isn't often French - can understand.

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I think it is important to notice how the whole narrative you create is based on the figure cards. We, human beings, automatically do that. We set the focus of an action of the humane-humanized characters of anything that is presented to us. If the story is about humans-human-like characters, then the story is about us.

Since we started this thread I have been re-reading Italo Calvino's "The Castle of Crossed destinies". I recommend you to get it and read it, starting at the second part: The Tavern of Crossed Destinies, which is the one based on the Marseille deck. Calvino mentions that the idea for the book was given to him by Paolo Fabbri's paper titled "The Story of Cartomancy and the Language of Emblems". This is part of an interview Fabbri gave: "I realized that cartomancy builds up a narrative by placing one card after the other. The contiguity of elements gave place to a narrative sequence that was created by selecting from two kinds of images: a kind of image which can be found as a constitutive part of the card, and some other that would however represent explicit contents. For example, in some cases the death card will represent death but in some others the cartomancer would select a figurative aspect which didn't belong to the card's content itself, for example, the scythe, which could be seen as a scythe or as a seven. As a consequence of this I pointed out that the narration was built by taking into account both the card's content-elements and expressive-elements, and the cartomancer would amplify her narration by choosing, based on

her narrative needs, either content-elements or expressive elements. Later on I discovered that the act of placing one card aside the next one constituted a syntax, even if there weren't elements that could be defined as specifically grammatical. Something similar to what happens with surrealist poetry, in which we place one word after the other one, and even if there is no semantic connexion between them, these words will create dependences and oppositions, building up an implicit narrative grammar. I also noticed, with surprise, that some of the trumps had an additional function beyond expressing content, since they also had a syntactic function. Lets take as an example the Devil card. Sometimes it represents the devil concept, but some other times it has a commutative function, acting as a catalyst or modifier of the action".

I was amazed of finding something that explains so clearly the way I look at the cards. But the most important thing here is that idea of both images as content and images as expressive elements (which mirrors the eye-rhymes + semantic field idea I shared with you), and then, the idea of images that are catalysts of the action. Usually these images are the figurative ones, which give accent and context to the cards depicting non-animated objects.

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In general terms I have no use for the numerological meaning of the pips. That is, I have no use for numbers-as-symbols. Within the context of the pips numbers indicate an ascendant progression, from one to ten. So, 2 won't represent duality, but "more than 1" and "less than 3". (The idea of an ascending progression gets reinforced by the panoramic each suit offers if we place it in sequence. We can clearly see a crescendo in each one of the series when they are aligned from one to ten. In this case, the fact that this crescendo goes from 4 to 7 doesn't negate the crescendo. We don't need the whole series to understand the progression). This is a numerical value I can see in the cards, while the numerological one -albeit useful sometimes- feels more of an imposition. This understanding allows us to read rhythms and patterns, even if we get cards of different suits mixed in a sequence. This is very important. In this case the sequence is very clean since we have wands following wands, but if instead of the 7 of wands we would have had the 7 of swords, of the 7 of cups, the same ascendant rhythm could have been read in the sequence. It is only that certain eye-rhymes would have changed.

(I understand this is not the way we are taught to look at the cards, but to be totally honest, when it comes to the Marseille the way we are taught to look at the cards

hasn't taken us too far. Please, anybody who has trouble understanding this, or finds it problematic, ask.)

Reading the pips is like riding a bicycle. We can only do it in motion. If we stop, we fall. 'Motion' in this case has to be understood as the arrangement of random sequences. Arguing about the symbolic meaning of a single pip may be exciting, but is not useful. A single pip, a single court card, a single trump, is like a vowel or a consonant. Their attributes are very limited unless we combine them with more cards.

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I used to think that the pips and the trumps should be kept separately. Now I am aware of that being a mistake. The difference between cards is an intellectual one, not a visual one.

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German artist Joseph Beuys defined five processes -grouping ten qualities for matter into binary opposites- he used to craft his sculptures:

ORDER-CHAOS
DETERMINED-UNDETERMINED
ORGANIC-CRYSTALLINE
WARM-COLD
EXPANSION-CONTRACTION

The bridge between any of these bipolar opposites was the concept of movement, which Beuys defined as: the artist's will at work, or, the channeling of organic energy.

I find interesting the use of the word movement as a substitute for change. Change is a word that makes people nervous, but movement has no such negative connotations. The artist as an agent of movement, or the diviner as an agent of movement, is a very attractive proposition.

Now, consider this: just as we have these five processes, we have the eight root metaphors we know as the basis for the I Ching:

HEAVEN-EARTH
FIRE-WATER

THUNDER-WIND MOUNTAIN-LAKE

If we define a person as our "matter", we could see how the person, at any given time, can be represented by any of these eight root metaphors. This is, a person can be a mountain, or a lake, or thunder, therefore adopting, by analogies, the qualities of that natural event. These qualities can also be extended at a symbolic level: a mountain would be a leader, or a hermit, or both; it would be male, active, an obstacle, and so on. But as metaphors, these natural events are somehow static. A mountain is a mountain, and it exist in tension with a lake. Now, when we contrast/combine these root metaphors with Beuys' estates for an sculpture, the combination renders the I Ching's root metaphor into a noun, and Beuys' process metaphor become some sort of an adjective.

For Beuys, part of the process defined as 'a sculpture' occurred when matter moved from one of these estates into its opposite. Here, it is important to notice that Beuys used very raw, time sensitive, materials in his work: iron, copper, sulphur, fat, honey. Under specific circumstances, the artist's will, defined by Beuys as movement, will transform the sculpture's materials, taking it from one extreme to its opposite within the aforementioned bipolar opposites. (If we think of fat, for example, we will see that fat will naturally melt, becoming warmer, of a further undetermined shape, in a chaotic, organic, expansive way.)

Something very interesting is that most of the time, such materials were used as metaphors for these processes. This is, the transformation would be hinted at by the material's own nature. The idea was to elicit in the viewer a certain feeling, or revelation.

Quite magical.

This interests me because we also work with 'raw', time sensitive, material: we work with people. The interesting thing is that these five bipolar processes are also metaphors, and a peculiar characteristic of these metaphors is that they have a dynamic quality. These are catalyst-metaphors. They suggest an action. So, we have a set of ten metaphors, grouped in binary opposites, and just as Beuys used these processes to modify matter, we can use them -as metaphors- to describe a person's situation and to suggest a certain movement towards its bipolar opposite. A person could be crystallizing, therefore needing to become more organic. A person could be expanding, therefore needing to contract. A person could be cold, therefore needing

to warm up, a person could be in total order, therefore needing to break onto chaos, etc.

How do we know whether a person is contracting, expanding, etc?

That is what the pips are telling us.

When we look at the pips we can always notice if the sequence goes from ORDER to CHAOS, from DETERMINED to UNDETERMINED, from ORGANIC to CRYSTALLINE, from WARM to COLD, or from EXPANSION to CONTRACTION. In broader terms Wands and Swords contract -in that they evolve by generating a solid shape in the middle of the card- while Cups and Coins expand -in that they spread across the card's surface- Even so, we can see that Swords are expanding if we compare them with Wands, and we can also see that Coins have a particular point of view that makes them expand over a horizontal plane, while Cups 'pile up' or expand on a vertical plane. All these are indications of movement, and such movement will give us, by analogy, an insight into the process a person is experiencing.

Shape becomes meaning, rhythm becomes message.

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Health-readings are a delicate matter. The fact that you can detect health issues makes some clients hope you can diagnose them, which is as absurd as thinking that just because you can see in the tarot a problem with a house that means you can fix a plumbing problem. For me the bottom line is that the tarot is good for SOUL PROBLEMS. Souls we can 'fix' (tongue in cheek). For the rest of things you need to consult the appropriate specialist. But in my experience, healing issues do come up strongly in the cards, or in other words, the cards are useful to point out when it is time to go and have a check-up by a doctor, and perhaps, why.

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Rhyme and resonance are two different things, in that rhymes are visual repetitions of identical or similar elements, while a resonance happens when an object 'calls' and another one 'responds', so the two of them activate a new meaning. Many times along our readings we will find both rhymes and resonances. Both of them conform a second layer of meaning after the whole rhythm of the sequence, to give us the three basic elements of our visual poetry: rhythm, rhyme, and resonance.

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The importance of being able to hear the cards is that what we are hearing is also a metaphor. That 'auditive' information is part of our imaginal response to the cards, and therefore, valuable information we can give our clients. Here, I would like to make a precision. I tend to regard all imagery I get while working with a person as being about that person, but most important, I see all that imagery as a metaphor of the person's situation, not necessarily as literal facts. This is what I find different between this kind of divination and what people call being 'psychic'. If I hear flames burning, that doesn't mean you will be invited to a barbecue. Fire could be a metaphor for creative urges, for passion, etc. This way the range of possibilities get amplified. I believe that, in order for divination to be fruitful, the client must take an active role at interpreting what the reader sees.

I believe it was painter Wassily Kandinsky (who may be credited as the 'inventor' of abstract painting) who composed some of his paintings looking to express the sounds of music. All very synesthetic.

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If the rhythm would tell me how things are going to go, rhyme and resonance would tell me why.

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Notice how we haven't dealt with meanings, suits, astrological deities, elements. We are extracting all our information from the way shape 'moves' along the card's sequence.

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Cartomancy is conceptually close to storytelling. We could even say storytelling and cartomancy are sisters. This is something we can talk about here, since it is clearly understandable at an intellectual level, but regular people hate the idea. They reject the connection between cartomancy and storytelling because they don't want to be told stories when they go for a reading. After all, our culture situates stories and truth as bipolar opposites.

Even so, every reader needs to cultivate his/her skills as storyteller.

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There are lots of misunderstanding and myths about what cold reading is or isn't. There is also a common confusion between cold reading and stock reading. The later is the one in which the reader simply repeats a basic script to everybody, twisting it slightly depending on the client's reactions. Think about how similar this is to have stock meaning for each card we repeat when they come up.

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There is an interesting notion from critic M. H. Abrams: the Heterocosmic analogue. I know that it sounds as something a proctologist would do, but it is defined as: "the parallel between writing poetry and creating the universe". This goes back to *similibus curentur*. Robert Frost comes to mind. His poetry can be read, literally, as mere descriptions of the countryside, or about life as a farmer. But on a metaphorical level they are addressing metaphysical topics. By means of his seemingly little descriptions, his words create a reality, inside and outside ourselves. When we look at our little cards, and we talk about them, we are doing the same thing. We are using specific images depicting characters or events from the outer worlds to talk about the inner world.

THIRD EXERCISE

Hello all.

I have posted a new essay on my site, under the Eye Rhyme section. This week's exercise will focus on the main idea in that text:

"A person comes to us because they have lost their words. They will never say it like that, but that is basically it. They have forgotten how to talk about a problem, or about themselves. Perhaps they simply haven't yet found the right words to talk about their future. We may have forgotten their future and need a few cue words to remember it. We give them our cards so they can use them to tell us their story, and we look at these cards to find some words we can give back to them."

If you think about it, having someone talking about our problems, or our experience, having someone naming it, is a soothing act in itself because it makes us feel acknowledged by validating our pain. A reading usually accomplishes more than that, but that is a good beginning. Obviously, in order for us to be able to give words to a person, we have to have words to give in the first place. So, this week's exercise may seem a little bit silly, and it probably needs to be taken in a spirit of silliness, since it should only be considered as some sort of "mental calisthenics". Our results shouldn't be memorized nor taken as definitive guidelines for looking at the cards. They should be seen more as "learning to fish" than as having "been given a fish".

The premise is very basic. I want each one of you to create a dictionary of synonyms for the pips. As an example we have Lark's wonderful interpretation of wands as arteries. Yes, wands can be arteries, but they can also be dog leashes, or as Stella shared, heavily embroidered doors. How many other things can these wands be? What about these swords, these cups and these coins?

I don't want your responses right away, but I would love to have your responses by Wednesday-Thursday, so we have some time to comment on them. Use these few days to compile a list.

Again, the idea is not to say: "Coins are mirrors, navels, and Mexican sombreros," but to train ourselves so we can see in the pips, on the spot, things as diverse as those.

Have fun!

EE

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It is all good. No one is getting it wrong because there is nothing to get wrong. We are just flexing our 'analogical muscles'. The idea is that, at some point during a reading, you will be able to see something in a card that escapes logical reasoning but will provide insight to your client/seeker. We only can do that if we practice.

I just want to add that coming up with more than one word/concept for each card would be better because these concepts shouldn't be taken as meanings, nor memorized, nor fixed. One day the Ace of Coins may seem like a backpack and the next day it may seem as a turtle nesting. Remember: we don't search for meanings, but for messages.

This is just an exercise. In practice it will become a lot easier to come up with analogies, since you will have a question or area of concern given by a client. This provides context and frames these analogies. A person who wants to know about her summer plans would more likely elicit in us something like: Ace of Coins = backpack, and a person asking if the time is right to buy a new home would more likely elicit in us Ace of Coins = turtle nesting. This is not to say that "a turtle nesting" is the only possible analogy we can see in that card if we are thinking about buying a house (this goes back to our first exercise), there will be several analogies that could apply, all of them equally valid.

(BTW, right now that Ace of Coins seems like a pumpkin turned into a carriage.)

You don't have to come up with several words for each one of the pips. Relax and do what you feel you can do.

Perhaps those of you who already did the whole exercise would like to do it again on a different day.

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Adjectives are great too. In a way we could even see the pips working as adjectives for the trumps, in that they modify/amplify/reshape the qualities of the trumps. That doesn't mean that the pips will always be taken as adjectives, but I find the simile useful.

•

The important thing here was to stretch our analogical muscles a little bit by actually tracing analogies between the pips and these events that have us consulting the cards at any given time.

To sum this exercise up I would like to quote painter Anselm Kiefer again. Since we are following the tradition of the image makers, no one would be better suited to give us inspiration than one of the greatest image-makers of our time. Just as we see the tarot as poetry, Kiefer sees painting as philosophy. His work is based on Jewish mysticism, the Kabbala, Astrology, Alchemy and gnosticism -examples in the web are abundant- and I find this little passage from an interview very eloquent with regard to our work here:

"The most interesting fact about constellations is that they are completely arbitrary. When we look up to the heavens we are always in a position to see new and different pictures. We can invent them millions of times, over and over again. And this demonstrates once more the many different layers of the Mythical. And of arbitrariness in a positive sense, which allows us to invent constellations as we see it fit... This brings us back to the beginning, where we said that there is no generally valid overall meaning-nothing per se. We must all create our own meaning. An artist creates a meaning and it is possible to associate this with constellations, which are images arbitrarily drawn by human beings."

I would like to insist in the convenience of having someone collecting all meanings in one single list. I don't mean an Excell sheet, but simply copy paste, so we can have all the imagery you have associated with each one of the pips listed together. This will help us relativize the intrinsic value of each one of these images since a pip will look today like something and tomorrow like something else, based on the context and the question we are working with.

I am really happy with your results, and very inspired by your latest comments.

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Both Swords and Wands sequences have this contractive sound that builds up along the sequence making each card almost indistinguishable from the others. The crescendo is very sustained, but not as eloquent as we see it happening in Cups and Coins. In both Swords and Wands there is always a binary pattern that we can define as "flower-no flower".

This is natural because, as we have seen before, Swords and Wands contract while Coins and cups expand. Imagine all the pips are basically the same 'material', a material that we can see as akin to wax. When you put wax in a mold to solidify, you get a candle. Candles may be tall, short, thick or thin, but they always look like candles. That is the way our Swords and Wands function. But if we melt wax, it will become very vital, and it will create all kind of different shapes on the ground. This is the way our Coins and Cups function.

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When we look at the image and we see it looking like something, we have an analogy. When we look at the image and we see it representing some other thing, we have a metaphor. In other words, a pip will either paraphrase something (analogy) or stand for something (metaphor). Both representational strategies are useful for us.

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No reason to feel down. If the person was satisfied with the reading then you did good. It is always about the other person, not about ourselves.

Even so, I understand what you are saying. You took a Ferrari for a test drive and got a bunch of red lights in a row.

We get what we get. Some times the messages in the cards are very simple: "Yes", "No", "feels right", "feels wrong". And we have to work with them. That is our bottom line: defining rhythms and turning them into messages. Some other times you get to see very interesting things and you experience very deep insights. The powerful part of all this is that we can't control it. That's what makes it so exciting, and new, every time.

•

I tend to think that a magician isn't a person who creates miracles, but a person who is able to detect miracles and point them out to others. I have had lots of readings where a card that has seemingly nothing to do with the reading just pops out, or falls on the table, and it ends up being the whole point in the reading. For me, that is the tarot's magic.

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Ah! See? You already gave her something she couldn't have gotten from a storefront reader. You created the space for her to experience the tarot. The first thing to learn from it is how anybody can get insights from the pips. The idea of the pips being 'non-illustrated' is a myth. The tarot is a visual oracle, and our traditions don't use it as a visual object, but as a mnemonic device. We work in the opposite direction. I love when people become actively involved with the cards!

A few anecdotes come to mind:

- There was this girl who wanted to know if going to Northern Iraq to work would be safe. I asked her to take three cards, as usual, and when I turned the third card over I noticed she had taken two cards instead of one. I asked her to choose one of these two and she pointed to the one on top. I took the second card, now definitively rejected and put it aside. The reading suggested struggle and discomfort, but no imminent danger. When the reading was clear, I told her: "You know, all of this is a metaphor. When you picked your cards something peculiar happened: you took two instead of one. Just as the cards are a metaphor of the situation, I would see that action having metaphorical consequences, so, I think we should take a look at that card you choose by accident." She agreed, and the card was The Tower.

I love when that happens!

So I told her: "as it happened on the table, your life over there will have you always in the vicinity of danger. I asked you to choose a card, and The Tower got stuck to it. I asked you a second time which one you wanted, and you were certain in that you wanted this other one. Once you are there, stick to your instinct. Don't second guess your hunches, and don't lower your guard."

I am certain that she will never forget that reading. Nor will I! If you think about it, I simply commented on what the cards were saying without words.

- I showed the Noblet to my kid's Karate sensei, explaining how I look at it. She spent a while looking at the cards. Now and then she would point at one card and say: "I know who this person is in my life!" Then she told me "I have had some enlightening experiences in my life, and I can see how these images can prompt one." I have never experienced the tarot like this. Can I have this image?"

I wasn't even doing a reading.

- A few weeks back I had a girl who comes quite often for readings. I like her a lot. She is a musician, very interested in many things, and very interesting. But she is going through lots of very hard stuff. At the end of the reading, she pointed to La Papesse and told me she always felt very represented by that card. Then she said: "I am leaving tomorrow. But I needed to look at this image. Yesterday I was at the Metropolitan Museum, looking at the medieval paintings. There is no red like medieval red, no blue like medieval blue... and these cards have these colors. These cards feel the same. I needed to come and look at them before going to deal with all my stuff abroad."

I told her Kokoshcka's story, just as I shared it here. I told her that that is exactly what I see in the tarot, and how difficult it is to explain this to people who prefer to dream about mermaids and leprechauns.

Things like that happen very often. I never ask a person: "what do you see in these cards?" because it feels too "Rorhasch-like". But it happens often that they will point at a card and tell me how that card is working on them. At that point we have to harness our reader's ego and become flight attendants. We aren't 'the captain' anymore.

The second thing we can learn from this is very, very important and it has to do with the intimacy that metaphors create. 'Getting' a metaphor implies a certain level of sensibility and attention. Not all clients will naturally go for that. Your client deserves praise for doing so. But here is the thing: as soon as she 'gets' the metaphor, the realization the metaphor brings is ten times stronger than something you simply spell out for her. Getting a metaphor is, in itself, a revelation. And then, her connection with you also becomes stronger because you get to share with her an understanding of the 'untold'. This is one of the most powerful things one can experience while working with the tarot.

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I have to say that I find the results of this exercise to be very satisfactory. I know this was a little stretch, but I think it was important to show how the pips are that heaven full of stars in which we can draw as many constellations as we see it fit. You don't have to 'take' these results with you. Drop them here and forget about them. Draw new constellations every time. It will be your client's question/concern that will provide the coordinates to do so.

In would like to wrap this third exercise up by sharing this quote from poet Ingeborg Bachmann:

"Whoever writes poetry engraves forms in our memory, wonderful old words for stone or lead, tied to or released by new words, new signs of reality. And I believe that whoever inscribes these forms also disappears into them with his own breath, which he offers as the unrequited proof of these forms truth."

Just like all poets disappear into their poems and wait for the reader to awake them again, the image makers disappeared into these cards we work with, and it is up to us to give back their life by breathing into their images. Looking at the cards we get their essence. Then we use metaphors and analogies to voice that essence in a way that gets adapted to our client's specific concern. Doing this is like catching an old tune that make us feel as if we always knew it.

The second thing I may like to suggest, for you to get proficient in the art of seeing metaphors and analogies in the pips, is to read poetry. All kinds of poetry. Some of you may find that silly, or boring. I for one became acquainted with poetry late in my life. Before that I always considered myself incapable to read it. Once I put the necessary attention into it my life became enriched, and my understanding of the tarot increased. I tend to suspect that all poetry is spiritual work, because the world of spirit can only be explained, and grasped, through metaphor. Any didactic approach simply trivializes it by trying to make rationally accessible what should always be a hunch. That is the tragedy of the new age market: by making the world of spirit 'clear', warm, and fuzzy, they transformed it into shiny gadgets and empty rituals. We may understand things. We may even understand what is not to be understood. But only what is revealed to us by metaphor brings us into intimacy with the untold.

For us, the main point of reading poetry is becoming familiar with metaphors, and with the way poets use many names to name the same things, which is basically what we do when we intend to tell all the stories from all the people in this world by using only 78 cards.

Just think about it.

•

I just want to amplify on what I was saying about the convenience of reading poetry. Consider this poem from Miklós Radnóti:

Postcard

4

I fell next to him. His body rolled over.
It was tight as a string before it snaps.
Shot in the back of the head-"this is how
you'll end". "Just lie quietly," I said to myself.
Patience flowers into death now.
"Der spring noch auf," I heard above me.
Dark filthy blood was drying on my ear.

Szentskirályszabdja, October 31, 1944

"Der spring noch auf" means something like "to pop open" and comes from a verb that describes flowers blossoming. A bullet making a brain blossoming from a head is a powerful image that takes us back to looking at the pips. Each card is a pistol's shot waiting to be turned into a blossoming. That is our job, turning pips into messages, bullets into blossoms.

(BTW, The only reason why you and I can read that poem is because Radnóti's wife had her husband's body exhumed from the mass grave where he was thrown on November 1944. The poem was on a notepad the corpse had in his pocket.)

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A very good friend of ours is an ornithologist. My son Matías asked him once if he could talk the language of the birds. My son wasn't referring to any occult code, of course, but to the possibility to actually 'speak bird'. Our friend explained to him that, when a bird is nervous, he moves its head in all directions, and when other birds see it, they know there is a reason to be aware. When a bird inflates its chest and stands high, the other bird will lower its head, to submit. He described many things like that. I found it peculiar that he never referred to singing, just to movement, as if the birds would speak a language of movements. I look at the tarot and I can see the cards talking in that very same language, a language of signs.

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The cards have no meaning. Not even our suits have a meaning. We could associate several things with them, like power, will, cold, air, etc, but that will be our choice, not the sword's fault. When we play cards, a Heart and a Spade are only valuable in terms

of their numerical value and combination with other cards. Same thing goes for Cups and Swords, etc. When we are thinking by analogy, as I am proposing here, the inherent meaning of a figure vanishes. Just as we can see a mother and two kids in the moon and its two dogs, we can see a snow fight on the six of cups. But what we see today won't be of use tomorrow, because we are aiming to develop a way of seeing that is also a way of thinking, always active, always dynamic.

I also think Swords and Wands are harder to look at. They are simply more abstract. Cups and Coins show objects positioned on a plane. Swords and Wands create additive structures (one structure is woven, the other is concentric). As Hooked said, the cards are easier to look at in combinations. It is only by combining cards that we can get eye rhymes, rhythms and patterns. That makes our work a lot easier.

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I believe all divination methods can render equally powerful results. But the freedom of actually being able to SEE things by ourselves is so empowering, so magical. It has us being 100% present in the moment of divination. The anticipation of not knowing what you are going to find each time is what keeps the attention at full swing. It makes our work as challenging as it is rewarding.

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It is always good to understand a single card without losing a sense of where it belongs in the series. That is how, for example, if we are looking at the V of Coupes, we will know that the fifth cup is that one in the center of the cards and not any other one. This understanding in itself provides enough narrative elements for us to see a story or event evolving.

FOURTH EXERCISE

Dear all,

For our fourth exercise I would like to borrow some ideas from Luc Bigé's book "Petite dictionnaire in langue des oiseaux." Although the book doesn't provide any historical background on the language of the birds, and I basically think he made the whole thing up, his take is useful as a departure point since he is basically organizing an understanding of how la langue de oiseaux, as a form of wordplay, can be used in today's French world.

Bigé points to something I am interested in: the prevalence of shape and sound over meaning when it comes to the way our unconscious perceives words. I see this as identical to the idea of the unconscious being affected by color and shape in the Marseille tarot. A sonic rhythm becomes a visual one, that's it. Then he goes into explaining what to look at in each letter. Here I start having problems with his system. In some letters he will go by shape, but in some others he will detect symbolism. This isn't a coherent system. So, I reversed engineered it: based on my understanding of the cards, I am able to see letters as shapes and derive messages from them. Same principle, different methodology.

He says that all the consonants' shapes evolve from combinations of the vowels. This is very interesting from a graphic point of view. But then I thought: there are two axes, a vertical one (being) and an horizontal one (becoming). These axes unite "above with below" and "past" with "future". Let's take the most minimal shape in our alphabet (the letter I) as reference, and establish it as "being." The letter I would represent the individual (not because the word 'individual' starts with an I, but because the letter I is made by one simple stroke). Now, let's assume that our sense of being gets reshaped by our sense of becoming. That is, when the vertical axis represented by the letter I is activated horizontal-wise, we have the letter I reshaping itself to form all the other letters in the alphabet. (I do this with the cards all the time. I look at the first card in a row, then at the last one, and ask myself: "what needs to happen for this image to become that other one"). Just as The Empress has to let her motherly energy erupt to become The Tower, the letter I breaks apart to become receptive to the ground and we have a letter A. When the letter I grows arms to embrace the world it creates the letter B. If the letter I curves itself, forming a letter C, it becomes receptive towards the future. This way, by understanding the 'motion' that took place from the original vertical stroke to become a letter, we have a narrative we can share, and we get to meditate on our own names, special words, etc.

Proposed as a way to play with the letters to get unexpected insights, clean of all occult, or esoteric flair, This is useful. Based on this idea, here is our exercise for this week: I want you to pick a random word in a dictionary, and I want you to 'read' that word as a narrative. I want you to forget about the word's meaning or etymology, and base your reading on the way shape progresses letter by letter along the word. In other words, do it as if each letter is a card.

Pay attention to:

- Optical rhythm: rising, falling, constant.
- Eye Rhymes among the letter's shape.
- Resonances among the letter's shape.

Look at and react to what you see, not to what you think the word means.

As a reference for what I am asking you to do, let me share this:

Last year a guy named Guillermo wrote to me saying the he wanted to change his sex. I thought this was an unique opportunity to explore the unconscious messages in the letters of a name, so, I asked him which name he would like to have after technically becoming a woman and he told me he wanted to call 'herself' GIGGIOLLA. There were several things I noticed, but these were the two most relevant: Instead of one G, he/she will now have three. I envisioned the G as an O that breaks its perfection to reaffirm its ego, like pointing to his chest with her thumb saying "me, me, me." In the change of name, the self-indulgence would get triplicated! The other relevant thing is the elimination of the R. Literally, the R is a P with a little "leg" moving forward. Both shape and sound of the letter R suggest driven (RRRRRRRRRR!). Instead of that he will now have only Gs and the two Ls. The L is an I that extends itself over the vertical plane, at a ground level. I took this as a gesture intended to affirm a terrenal, sexual nature. I saw him making himself completely passive, and getting rid of all his drive. On top of that I noticed that GIGGIOLLA can be separated in GIGGI and OLLA. Giggi is the name of a infamous, very tacky, TV actress in Venezuela, where this guy lives. 'Olla' means 'pot' in Spanish, like a cooking pot. The name describes then a bimbo-receptacle.

I wrote back to him explaining that I had compared the shapes of the letters in both names, paying special attention to the letters that were present in the original name and now were missing in the new name, and showed him how the new name suggested that he was making himself into a doll, or a sex-toy. The point wasn't to

judge this person's hopes, or choices, but to arrive at certain ideas by non-logical means so I can give him some things to think about. This led to a powerful conversation about true motivations, and possible adjustments of his plan. Interestingly, from that point on the guy started talking about "loosing my R", and "having to keep my R on."

This exercise is totally about looking. I hope it will help us to understand even better how to approach shape instead of meaning by showing how, even something as familiar to us as the letters of the alphabet can give us messages if we see with new eyes.

It would be great if you can do this exercise, which is fairly short, and also follow Satori's example in the previous thread, by going through the whole deck or part of it while asking to each card "what am I missing", or any other question you find interesting to explore.

I have also posted a new essay on my Eye Rhyme site.

Have fun with this one! As usual, if you have any questions, please ask.

All the best, and thanks,

EE

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Look at the word TAROT.

The consonants conform the 'body' of the word: TRT

The first letter is a T, the last letter is a T: TT, like a house. A house with an R inside. A temple for that "RRRRRRR" sound. There we have our inner cathedral, holding the sound of Spirit!

A letter T represents an individual 'reaching for heaven', or expanding only on a vertical plane, but that expansion has been blocked, or stopped. In a way, the letter T suggests an individual who wants to live in the intellectual plane (if we look at the letter E we will see that letters would show the individual expanding in three different levels: lower/terrenal, middle/emotional, high/intellectual). By living in the intellectual plane the individual discovers that sky is not the limit, but thoughts are. That's why the

individual needs to move forward, as indicated by the letter R, but the individual moves only to find itself being trapped, again on a higher plane, in the final letter T.

If we were to operate like that we wouldn't be very practical!

The vowels conform the 'soul' of the word: AO

The letter A will be the individual becoming receptive to the ground, and the letter O would be the individual becoming whole. So, the message in the vowels would be "keep an eye on reality to get the full picture".

The catalyst for the whole operation would be the letter R, which as I said before is a very driven shape, like the shape of a locomotive's face, which moves the individual from being receptive to the ground (Letter A) to be whole, as represented in the letter O. But if we stop for a little bit to analyze the letter R we see that it comes from the letter P, and the letter P is created by the combination of the letter I and the letter O. A letter P is a letter I that became 'pregnant' at an intellectual level. That is why the letter R's diagonal 'leg' is so important: it helps the letter P move forward while anchoring that pregnancy to the ground.

When we combine consonants and vowels, the message in the word TAROT would be: "Reach for heaven to work on earth. Keep your insights practical!". No matter how elevated our insights, they are worthless if they can't be applied to our day to day experience, for the tarot is a machine that creates inspiration for real life.

Se, there you have it. It is just a game. But if we play we may 'get' something we won't get when we aren't playing.

The main point I want to make with this exercise is this: in any process (word, card's sequence, sea shells cast on a mat) we witness, we need to detect the ongoing narrative. I have found out that the key question to uncover such a narrative is this one: "How this came to be?" How that letter A came to be? How that letter R came to be? How that V de Epees came to be? How that Royne de Couppes came to be? The questions presupposes that whatever we are looking at isn't a static event, but an individual snapshot, a moment, a single manifestation of a continuous flow. This way, we can make letters, the cards, and the whole reality talk to us.

•

The Letter E and the letter L both move forward. But the E moves in all three levels, like a knight on a horse, while the L goes "on foot", like a valet, or our Fool. If you notice it, the E seems like a horse standing on two legs, while the L looks like a boot. :-) The Letter S moves back and forward from heaven to earth. I see the same communication in The Tower, Judgement. These are the cards in which the characters at the bottom react or dialogue with the heavenly elements. The letter A shows, almost literally, the magicians two legs standing up straight.

It is all about detecting patterns and shape, but also, about understanding that shape is a manifestation of movement. A snapshot, as Rudolph Laban would put it.

Everything is as interesting as we perceive it to be.

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That is the essence of the exercise. By looking at the letters as we look at the cards I am hoping to put in evidence that we can see more than we think in any shape of any object. We tend to be so used to what we have learned about the cards that it is very hard for us to just look at them (This is something that, I believe, this group overcame already). In the same way, we are so used to our phonetic alphabet that we find it very hard to ignore the letters sound and focus on their visual shape (You are all doing beautiful at this!). When we finally look with our 'empty eyes', we start finding analogies between the letter's, and the card's shapes. Eventually, everything can be seen as shape. When the eyes of a person are too wide apart we can see she is good at getting the whole picture, but it is hard for her to focus on the small details. A nose with a strong curvature, like a sharp hook, belongs to a man who will change strategies midway towards his goals... Soon enough, reality will speak to us in the language of shape.

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For a general reading, work with the person's name. For a specific question/issue, have the person condensing whatever the issue is in one single word. The idea is to use shape to meditate about something. Again, it is a game. But it can be an useful game if we dare to play it 'seriously'.

•

I have literally spent the entire week looking for a book. I wanted to share with you an exact reference about Milton Erickson, the father of hypnotherapy, and how he taught his grandmother to read by showing her the shapes of the letters. But I never found that book (Healing with Hypnosis). I did find this quote, in another book (Milton H. Erickson An American Healer), which is somehow related to the one I was looking for. You will see how it is totally pertinent to what we were doing here. Let me preface it by pointing out that Erickson was color blind, tone deaf and dyslexic.

"Erickson told us that his teacher got mad because she was not able to make him understand the differences between the letter "m" and the number "3." Suddenly one day, in a ray of light, he said that "m" was like a horse standing on all four legs with its head bent down to the ground, and the "3" was like a horse standing on his hind legs. He said the flash of light was so strong and brilliant that he could only distinguish the "m" and the "3" amid that explosion of light".

I kind of know what "explosion of light" he is talking about. Don't you?

•

Let me put and end to this thread with this wonderful phrase from Poet Theodore Roethke:

"Remember: our deepest perceptions are a waste if we have no sense of form."

•

FIFTH EXERCISE

Dear all,

In this week's essay I mention Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, who is literally regarded as the Saint of Haiku. There is one technique in haiku-making that I find very useful for crafting metaphors. It basically consists of seeing, or thinking, of something, and then finding three sentences to describe it. For a long time Western scholars have thought that Japanese poets employ no metaphors in their haiku, when in truth, they simply have a different way to create metaphors. For us, a metaphors creates meaning by establishing a relationship between two terms. Each term must be significant by itself. The capacity a metaphor has to create meaning depends on having us perceiving a relationship between these two components.

In a haiku meaning is created as if we were drawing with words. The haiku present us with three different strokes to complete a metaphor. Take for example this haiku from Basho:

roadside rose
of sharon: devoured
by my horse

Here, Basho is creating meaning by giving us three images: a rose, eaten, by a horse. What is powerful about this is that he uses very specific images to have us completing a whole event which is small/specific enough to elicit all kinds of sensations. One can listen to the powerful jaws of a huge horse chewing these tender petals. The experience becomes a full sensory spectrum one.

Haikus have very specific technical requirements (a first line composed by 5 sounds, a second line composed by 7 sounds, a third line composed by 5 sounds). Leaving aside that, I would like that you, this week, looking at the cards not to write haiku but to 'think haiku'. In other words, I would like for you to place three or four cards in a row and define a whole idea by describing each card using one single sentence.

For example:

Lets say we have THE FOV, THE CHARIOT, V DE BATONS, ACE DE COUPPES

Then I would say:

THE FOV: a man walking

THE CHARIOT: takes a lift

V DE BATONS: and gets derailed

ACE DE COUPPES: from his objective

"A man walking takes a lift and gets derailed from his objective"

This would be the faster way to get a message from the cards. We create one whole, specific, idea by assigning very specific, LITERAL, ideas to each card in a sequence (try not to get symbolic here, but very literal: The Fool is a man walking, just that. The V de Batons a bunch of interwoven roads, things like that). The work we have done at seeing analogies in the pips (Exercise Number Three) and the work we have done at creating whole narratives from shape (Exercise Number Four) should make this exercise very simple.

Please, do this exercise at least three times. This is, draw at least three sequences of three or four cards, and proceed in the way I did on the example above. Those of you who may want to do more are welcome to do so. (The way I used to practice was by drawing three cards, seeing a message in this way, then I would draw three more cards, see another message, and so on until I went through the whole deck, day after day.)

As usual, questions and comments are welcome.

Best,

EE

•

The first thing I feel like pointing out is how, now that we are working with three cards, the act of seeing something in one card gets easier. You are all getting sharper!

'Silly' is OK. In any case, you may want to try rephrasing your sentences, so they describe things that could happen to real people. Right now, as an exercise, stretching the images is OK. But in practice we will have to deliver these sentences to a real client, and she might get lost if we start talking about monkeys. :-)

Or not... In regard of this issue, there is a quote from Anselm Kiefer I would like to share with you all:

"Everything we say is fiction. "It is a nice day" is already a fiction. That is why we must avoid constructing dogma with language. The idea that plants are directly connected with the stars is very pretty. Its an explanation that works with me dasein. It's a consolation. Having said that, irony is indispensable. These are words pronounced by human beings, they can only be used ironically because they are always incomplete. What we say is always a bit ridiculous. People who use words without irony are fanatics, not full human beings. One should always be ready to laugh, because everything is ridiculous. I distrust belief, all dogma. They are nothing but ways of gaining power, of exciting chauvinism."

I would like that all of you meditate on this quote, so we can move towards the second part of the exercise.

When I look at the cards, for a client, I will see things like the ones you are seeing:

"I spin a wheel, seeking momentum, and hit the jackpot."

The thing is that, just as Kiefer is saying in that quote, I have to keep my dogmatism in check. I can't just forcefully state: "You are going to win the lottery!" "You will see! You are going to win!" I have seen readers who are like that. You can even tell them "But... I never play the lottery" and they will keep insisting: "It doesn't matter. Here it is, very clear: You are going to win the lottery!" So, when I see a message like that in the cards, I will go for it, but I will do so by understanding that the message operates at two different levels: a literal level, and a metaphorical level.

"You spin a wheel, seeking momentum, and hit the jackpot" is a great message for a reading. In fact, all of the messages you wrote are. I would deliver it just like that. As Satori pointed out, it is possible that this person will actually win the lottery. But it is more likely to think that this message describes an energetic imprint at a metaphorical level. Most of the times, an intelligent client will see through the literal statement and apprehend the metaphor. They will understand because, as I pointed out at the beginning of this thread, the cards are an image wanted to be turned into a metaphor by our client. By our client, not necessarily by us! In a few cases, people may laugh at you and say "That would be nice!" and you may feel inclined to explain that your statement has an additional depth. Only in the very specific case of your

client asking "Will I win the lottery?" you can be certain that the message's main emphasis is literal.

What happens in the rest of the cases?

Well, as I said before, we assume the message is a metaphor for something. In this case, it is a metaphor for "the time is right to set things in motion". As I said before, most intelligent clients will understand this, yet you need to be prepared to see the metaphor in the message, just in case they need a little push. The trick here is that we can't think metaphors without seeing the cards literally. I am going to repeat that: we can't think metaphors without seeing the cards literally. We need our literal statements to elicit a metaphor in our mind, or in the mind of a person, because metaphors cannot be paraphrased, nor explained. They can only be understood by imaging.

In Basho's poem:

roadside rose
of sharon: devoured
by my horse

We can experience the contrast between the solid mass of a muscular horse and the tenderness of a rose. I can see the soft lips of the horse touching gently the rose bulb, and I can almost hear its strong jaws crushing the whole rose without difficulties. All these experiences are suggested by the poem, but at a deeper level, the poem is a metaphor for the impermanence of life. We can envision a red rose at a roadside, standing proud and perfect. A rose is eternal... until it decays. But the sight of a rose is eternal in itself, unless of course, a huge horse comes and bites it off! The unexpected, fate, chance, luck... call it in any way you want, is always chasing our sense of permanence.

To rephrase all that: we look at the cards as we have been looking so far, searching for a literal statement like: "An angel pours matured foundations leading chained slaves", "With knitting needles and yarn a purse was made", etc. We may deliver that statement to the person as it is. But we do so knowing that in most cases the statement doesn't describe a literal event but a metaphorical one.

- An angel pours matured foundations leading chained slaves: "You will get help to move out".

- With knitting needles and yarn a purse was made: "Follow all the steps. Don't get ahead of yourself."

That will be the second part of this exercise. Please, do three more examples, and after you have stated literally what you are seeing, answer this question: what is this metaphor for?

•

Longer is fine. We aren't truly writing haiku, but borrowing a way of looking at things from the haiku poets. Eventually you could get whole paragraphs from three cards. That is OK.

The other thing is, take a rest now and then. You are doing great. But sometimes we need to pace ourselves a little bit, look at some other things, and then go back to the tarot.

•

My only suggestion would be, on these occasions in which you are working with a client, to keep your metaphors from stretching too much. Otherwise, you may end up losing the client's attention. In the specific case you are sharing with us, telling to a person that she has three options will be enough. Stating that she may become a veterinarian may be too stretchy, especially if you are talking about treating lion's teeth!

This is important. I have to thank you for this example, because it allows me to point out something: there is a difference between what we see in the cards, and what we say to a client. Looking at the 3 of Wands, La Force, and The Lover, you may see that "She had three choices: become a veterinarian and work on lions with dental issues, become a marriage counselor, or become a pilot and fly newlyweds to their honeymoon vacation spots". Yet you may want to tell your client: "I see so many possibilities here! Your options are limited only by your imagination. If you were to tell me, right now, that you want to become a dentist for lions, I would believe you! Think of what you love most and set about deciding how to get it."

In that case, what you are getting from the cards would be more of a hyperbole than a metaphor. Stated like that, as a "controlled exaggeration", what you are seeing can be very effective, because you are genuinely expressing your amazement at the vast range of possibilities you are seeing in the cards, by commenting on how you get

"veterinarian" "marriage counselor" and "pilot (or travel agent)". But if you go too far at stretching your imagery, your client might reject what you are saying, because it might sound too far-fetched to her.

Here, for the purpose of all these exercises, we are thinking aloud. In the event of a reading, we need to process a little bit more how do we voice what we see. Sadly, I find it very difficult to say how much is too much. You may find yourself in a situation in which "a veterinarian who works on lions with dental issues" hits the nail on the head. My suggestion would always be to trust to what you see in the cards. But IF you feel you have a tendency to go overboard, then working on a more "realistic" approach would be useful.

•

The closest thing to reading the tarot, IMO, would be playing a musical instrument. We literally make these cards sound! Provided with the same piano, or violin, each one of us will have a particular way to make it sound. There has to be a combination of training, skill, and inspiration to it. The key to originality isn't so much on searching for our own voice, but on being able to recognize our own voice any time it shows up.

•

By all means, keep playing!

This is the space to go crazy and push the limits.

Pushing the limits is a way of finding them.

•

Some times you will find that you have to say it like you are seeing it. Only practice will give you that. There is something I have learned by practicing with the pendulum, and this is that there is a 'right' swing, and also an 'empty' swing. When you feel the right swing you know you are connecting with the pendulum, the rest of the time, it is just swinging in an empty way. Same thing happens with impressions and messages from the cards. You will feel when you have to voice something without filtering it, when craziness isn't just empty craziness but 'right craziness'.

•

I am happy you noticed the similarity between this and the I Ching. Both share the idea of saying just enough. Obviously, we can't always expect our clients to be content with one single line for a reading, but it is always good to let them fill in the blanks a little. The human mind has a poetic capacity that is both constructive and expansive. A reading creates a great space for us to exercise that along with our clients.

It is very important for me to point out that the messages we usually get from the Marseille are very sharp, right to the point, just like the examples you are all sharing here. WE can then use a million words to talk about them, if we want, but the fact is that, just by glancing at the cards we know what is going on. Sangomas, the South African diviners, would call a divination a 'diagnosis'. They will use their bones to tell what is wrong with a person. What we are doing here is very close to that. We look at three cards, and we have a diagnosis, a sharp statement about what is going on with the person. Even so, I always like to maintain a little metaphorical awareness, since what we see may be affecting the person at more than one level. After all, our words are always provisional.

•

I believe most knowledge regarding the tarot has to be experiential. There is no point on being given an answer for a question we haven't asked ourselves. But when certain things 'click' and we 'get' them, the understanding of them becomes relevant and useful.

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In a reading there are lots of 'warm' components: human interaction, undivided attention, venting, validation of pain, projective identification, subjective validation, etc... But I like to think the other person has to walk away with a strong image, metaphor, or notion, she can pocket and keep with her, like a talisman. That is what we are accomplishing here, in part. Not only we want to see things in the cards, but we want to have the possibility of arriving at a sharp, simple, message people can take from us.

I would like to go back to the work of Joseph Beuys, which we touched on our first or second exercise. According to him, his sculptures created "an almost chemical process among people that would have been impossible if I had only spoken theoretically." This goes back to the idea of metaphors being understood only at an

imaginal level. We have to be there, and experience them, to see them. They can't be explained in full. Beuys also said that he worked not with symbols but with materials. I think this is relevant because understanding the tarot as a material is extremely important. I know this notion can be hard to grasp. We are working with something that is akin to clay, or wax, or bronze; something we pour on the table so we can rejoice in the shapes it create. Within that model, the differences between trumps, courts, and pips are secondary. It is all the same material, one malleable brick of paper we get to spread countless times over a surface. What we are doing here is not far away from scrying. We spread our material over the table to see on it the reflexions of our own awareness.

Beuys also believed that the less literal the performances were, the easier it would be for the audience members to translate his message into their own lives. This has to do with what I was pointing out with regard to having a metaphorical layer always in mind when we do our readings. We work literally so we can be metaphorical, and we work metaphorically so we can be literal.

Finally, I would like to leave you for now with this quote. Beuys once said: "Art is not there to provide knowledge in direct ways. It produces deepened perceptions of experience. . . . Art is not there to be simply understood, or we would have no need of art."

•

It has been great to read the insights you are all sharing here. I am going to add a couple of things, without responding to any post in particular.

- I think it is important to point out that, here, we are tapping into the anagogical level of these cards (by taking them as medieval documents), but there is also a literal, allegorical, and moral level that can be studied and explored. We aren't focusing on that here, but some people are doing great work at that, and therefore, getting familiar with their work can only make you, not better readers, but better persons.

- I am very grateful for all your kind comments on these exercises. They mean the world to me. Most importantly, I personally thank you for being here, and for not giving up on the Marseille. I have enormous problems with the 'illustrated' pips on the non-Marseille decks because I feel they put a leash on my possibilities for insight. These days, we live in a "visual culture for the visually impaired", in which our eyes are fed but we don't see. I opened this exercises relating a story from Oskar Kokoschka, the Austrian painter. Late on his life Kokoschka opened a school for artists, a summer

school. He called it "The School of Sight". He taught people who wanted to become painters, not how to paint, but how to see. The Marseille has been my own school of sight. Not giving up on the initially abstract nature of the pips helped me understand that everything has a voice, everything can talk to us. The other day I took my two kids plus 4 friends to the movies. They were really pushing my nerves! Yet, when we passed by a building, two of the kids stopped to feel the air coming from a duct. The duct came from the building's laundry room, and the kids stopped to rejoice in the dry smell of laundry. Right there, that was a haiku! The duct was a voice calling these kids, just as a little vine on a card is a voice calling us.

- I already posted these two quotes from Anselm Kiefer before, but I will post them again because I think it is good to keep them "at our bedside" when we explore the world of symbol. Kiefer is an interesting example in that he is a skeptic, working through his art on his own spiritual development. The true work of any artist is to make his/her own soul. Since my background is in the arts too, I guess it is equally natural for me to grab a symbol to turn it around and see how it works, all that without feeling I am committing a sacrilege. All symbols are man made. As Kiefer has also said "all stories about heaven started on earth". At some point in history, an image-maker purposefully created each symbol we know. We have a peculiar relationship with symbols in that we tend to relate to them as if they were chains, chains that we create for ourselves.

Here are the quotes again:

"The most interesting fact about constellations is that they are completely arbitrary. When we look up to the heavens we are always in a position to see new and different pictures. We can invent them millions of times, over and over again. And this demonstrates once more the many different layers of the Mythical. And of arbitrariness in a positive sense, which allows us to invent constellations as we see it fit... This brings us back to the beginning, where we said that there is no generally valid overall meaning-nothing per se. We must all create our own meaning. An artist creates a meaning and it is possible to associate this with constellations, which are images arbitrarily drawn by human beings."

"Everything we say is fiction. "It is a nice day" is already a fiction. That is why we must avoid constructing dogma with language. The idea that plants are directly connected with the stars is very pretty. Its an explanation that works with me dasein. It's a consolation. Having said that, irony is indispensable. These are words pronounced by human beings, they can only be used ironically because they are always incomplete. What we say is always a bit ridiculous. People who use words without irony are

fanatics, not full human beings. One should always be ready to laugh, because everything is ridiculous. I distrust belief, all dogma. They are nothing but ways of gaining power, of exciting chauvinism."

- Ritual is good, but only if we use it to set the tone of an experience. It becomes useless when it is used to instill in us the fear of being inadequate.

- I agree with the idea of the Marseille being a tarot for the common man. This is to say, these cards were cheap, and they were roughly made. I find peculiar the obsession some people have about finding the illusion of intention in each single detail of these cards: "Look! There is an extra finger in La Force's foot. A certain allusion to the Druids' recipe for chutney". Have you ever been in a printing workshop? Then you will know that most of the guys working there are akin to plumbers, or mechanics: technicians and workmen who are dying to go home at the end of the day. Many obtuse details in the cards are simply that: mistakes who no one cared to fix because these cards were intended to be sold to the common man who, in turn, wanted to play with them. Our rejoice in that roughness is, in fact, a sign of what Ernst Gombrich defined as "The Preference for the Primitive", which has to do with the way art history, and taste, swings back and forth between a thirst for beauty and a longing for transcendence. Our quest for beauty always takes us to an extreme, an excess or mannerism, which is pretty much what we see these days with all these fantasy tarots. When we go too far on that path, that is, when our lust blinds us and we get too many 'tarot cup-cakes' we feel the urge to regain our ground by embracing rougher, simpler, shapes. That "preference for the primitive" underlines a psychological principle that goes back to Plato: a simpler life is morally superior, therefore, simpler shapes are 'truer' shapes. Having this in mind is very useful when we choose a Tarot deck. Especially if we want to elicit powerful psychological phenomena in our guests' minds with them.

- Finally, I have a little secret to share: it is my intention to find better words to talk about the tarot, so I can give you better words to talk about the tarot. I have seen how, when a regular person approaches the tarot without weird preconceptions, the results are extraordinary and the tarot becomes truly useful. But so far, in our field, we have been happy with assuming we are weird, that only those who share our weirdness will come to us, and that this is OK. I don't see the usefulness of that. That is why I want to borrow the words of poetry, painting, philosophy, psychology and art, to bring the tarot up to the level it deserves to be. Two nights ago we saw *The Tiger in the Snow*, by Roberto Benigni. The movie is 'flaccid' at best. But it has a couple of extraordinary moments. One of them is when Benigni, who plays the role of a poet in the film, explains to his daughter why he became a poet: "One day I was at the park and a bird

perched itself on my shoulder for about an hour. I stood there, like a tree, until the bird left. It was so amazing that I ran excited to tell my mom, but she was busy and didn't pay attention to me". Begnini's daughters said "That was bad from Grandma!" and Benigni said: "No. It was me. I didn't tell the story right. I didn't choose the right words to say what I was feeling. That is why, when I learned that there were poets, people who worked at finding the right words for everything, I became one."

All the time, I am looking for better words to talk about the tarot, something that most people take for granted as the silly pastime of superstitious geeks.

•

The Hadar is perfectly fine.

I am not crazy about the Fournier in that I consider the alteration done to the background-colors totally uncalled for. We don't need that watercolor-like finishing at all! But it still has the structure, and that is still useful. Since Fournier is a superb card maker, the feeling of the deck is very nice.

What I like about the Noblet is that Jean-Claude and Roxanne Flornoy took care on not letting their egos get into the cards. What we see is a reproduction, as close as possible, of the deck you can find at the National Library of France. They felt no need to "improve" the deck. After all, who said these decks needed improvement?

•

I agree with you, working with groups of cards makes it easier. That is perhaps the most important point of what I am trying to share with all of you here. One card is like one single letter: nothing, an isolated sound. It can only create meaning when it is conjugated with some more shapes. And just like the letters in our phonetic alphabet, the context will define how each letter sounds.

Now, any of these messages you are seeing in the cards would be something I will deliver to a client in a reading. You may call a 'disadvantage' of this method that the answers we get from the cards are right to the point: a feeling that we can turn into a sentence. There is no big story, just simple messages. This may be a little disconcerting when you are doing a reading for someone. You may feel you are saying too little. I feel these messages say what is needed to be said. Then, if there is a need to explore the issue at hand further, you draw three more cards, or you rephrase

the question in even more specific terms, and you get a new message which reshapes the precious one. Readings become very useful, very practical, this way.

•

You draw three new cards for each question, or each re-phrasing of the question.

In other words, three cards will provide an answer for a question, but that answer may elicit new questions, or a rephrasing of the original question. To answer any of that you draw three new cards.

In a reading, I could go through the whole deck, three/four cards at a time. Not very different from what we have been doing in this exercise.

•

It rarely happens that I have to go through the whole deck with one person. Usually, three to nine cards will suffice. Except when they come with a 'battery' of questions. :-)

SIXTH EXERCISE

Dear all,

I regret to say that we have arrived at our last exercise. It has been enormously fun for me to 'meet' with you here, weekly. Of course, this is not a "good bye" since we will be working on some readings for a couple of weeks starting next week, and because we will hopefully keep in touch. I am 'here' for you at any time.

For our last exercise we will again look at three cards together, maximum five. Why do I say "maximum five"? because when I have my three cards on the table, and I see that one of the characters in the cards is looking outside the sequence, I find useful to place a card there to 'close' the spread and see what it is that the character is looking at (I first learned about the idea of following the character's gaze in Paul Marteau's book, but I have seen Jodorowsky doing the same, and I know Philippe Camoin suggests the same thing in his method). Since a character may be seeing outside the sequence either at the beginning or the end of the three card-sequence, the original sequence might grow from three to four cards, if only one character is looking out, or from three to five if we have characters looking outside both at the beginning and the end of the sequence. (Wow! So complicated to explain by writing, so simple to actually see!)

Only human characters look out. If a pip is at the beginning or the end of a sequence, there is no need to place any additional card.

So, please, give it a try and work with this simple arrangement: a single row of three cards that you might eventually extend up to five cards.

So far, in our exercises, we have been kind of "zooming out" from looking at specific details in the cards to looking at single cards and then at whole sequences. This way we work according to the way the whole pack of cards, as an object, functions, which is in a constantly changing sequence. Do you know how much is "too much salt"? It is very hard to say if we don't know what we are cooking, for whom, or for how many people. Same thing happens with each card. What does a card mean? It is very hard to say if we don't know what we are asking, who is asking, and how many other cards are on the table. In our fifth exercise we noticed how we are able to get the cards' message as soon as we look at them. The message is simple and direct. The only real difficulty lies in putting that understanding into words. This weeks' exercise builds upon our fifth exercise. The idea is to facilitate this process, so we can detect the message in a sequence of cards and know what to say.

The exercise is simple: look at three cards and ask yourselves these two questions:

- What is happening?
- How does this feel?

(Those of you who have my lecture notes will know these questions already. I saved them for the end because I think they are extremely useful. Especially when a client has no question.)

The first question should lead to a more or less objective description of the image. Here we apply all that we have been practicing in the previous exercises: we define a three-part sentence based on the images (haiku-style), we look for eye-rhymes, rhythms, and patterns. The second question should lead to a 'memory-search' for those moments of our life that can be illustrated by the card's image. I don't want a subjective response to the artwork, but a recollection of a moment in which you have felt something similar to what you see happening in the cards. Answer with your memory.

Please, do at least three sequences stating "What is happening?" and "How does this feel?".

Questions are welcome. I am looking forward to your insights!

Best,

EE

•

For the sake of the exercise, could you please rephrase your replies, literally answering:

- What is happening: (Here you put your answer)
- How does this feel: (Here you put your answer)

I know it sounds too school-like, but this will help you reach further within each category.

•

On a daily basis I am surprised at how much the average person sees in these pips if we let them. We only have to guide them, and by 'guiding' them I basically mean showing them what we are seeing. I like to point at the elements in the cards with my finger and tell them where am I seeing what I am seeing, so they know why am I saying it. More often than not they take over immediately. You only have to invite them to play.

I have also noticed how the pips function as some sort of diagram, either for a situation (This cup is you, now look at all these cups surrounding you, but more important, to that other cup that is at the same level as you, separated from you only by a vine -8 de Couppes-), or as a diagram for an emotional state (Perhaps you are too defensive, creating all these barriers for others to come in and discover what you have to share -8 de Epees-). We all have doodle diagrams to understand a direction, or something, either in a piece of paper, or even on the ground. We all know the language.

Your exercises are beautiful. I would like to point out two things:

1- Try answering the questions while looking at the whole sequence, not card by card (we are zooming out, remember?) Imagine that we can work now by going in the opposite direction from the exercises' order:

- We look at the whole sequence and ask ourselves these questions.
- We look card by card, getting a sentence from each one of them and consolidating one single message.
- We look for rhythms and patterns.
- We look for eye rhymes

It is very hard not to see a message if we can look at the cards through all these lenses!

2- The "How does this feel" is meant to be autobiographical. You have a huge reservoir of experience accumulated to borrow from when you are giving a reading. You don't have to expose yourselves in any way that you may feel uncomfortable, but you can trust that, most of the time, human experience exists in a common ground: we have all experienced loss, anger, sorrow, joy, anticipation for the new, anxiety about change, remorse after an event, etc...

•

Well, you either see, or you don't. When you don't see, no amount of "showing" will suffice, but when you see, there is no way of not seeing. Something I learned years ago while teaching graphic design is that you can't give a person an answer for a question they haven't asked. People rarely see the relevance of an answer they don't need.

I am very fond of Milton Erickson's work. In fact I believe anybody interested in creating meaningful relationships with other human beings should get familiar with his ideas. He said that a person will always be more enthusiastic about any process if they come for help than if they come for a demonstration. In other words, these findings are theoretically relevant for us because we are interested in learning the tarot, but they are pretty much irrelevant for others unless they are emotionally involved in the process by feeling they will benefit from it.

•

Do you remember when you were learning to write? Each single stroke needed to write each single letter was a conscious act demanding your full attention. When you were learning to read, matching each letter's shape with its sound demanded also your full, undivided, attention. At first, reading single words was a monumental accomplishment. Then, reading whole sentences was a monumental accomplishment, and you didn't notice that reading single words had stopped being a challenge. Then, reading whole paragraphs was a monumental accomplishment, and you didn't notice that reading whole sentences had stopped being a challenge.

Today you read and write without thinking about it.

It isn't amazing?

•

I already shared my 'meanings' for the trumps:

LE BATELEUR: The moment you master something, but you aren't ready to take credit.

LA PAGESSE: The moment you take your eyes away from the page and stare at the empty space.

LEMPERATICE: The moment you know that all you have accomplished won't suffice.

LEMPEREUR: The moment you dream about what you will never do.

LE PAPE: The moment you let someone else do the thinking.

LAMOREUX: The moment you you don't know.

LE CHARIOT: The moment you you think you know, and go for it without holding back.

JUSTICE: The moment you realize you know as much as you don't know, but you can't tell the difference.

LERMTE: The moment you retrace your steps by feeling instead of thinking.

LA ROUE DE FORTUNE: The moment you you know it is all just a moment.

LA FORCE: The moment you struggle between what you have learned and what you have been told.

LE PENDU: The moment you laugh after nailing yourself into a cross.

LA MORT: The moment you follow your wounds.

TEMPERANCE: The moment you find comfort in the smallest tasks.

LE DIABLE: The moment wrong feels right.

LA MAISON DIEU: The moment you wish you never prayed for a miracle.

LESTOILLE: The moment you win by surrendering.

LA LUNE: The moment your words fail you.

LE SOLEIL: The moment you find your words in other person's ear.

LE JUDGEMENT: The moment you remember what was dead.

LE MONDE: The moment you mind moves on.

THE FOV: The moment your body follows it.

They are useless most of the time. Context is everything.

I don't regard the trumps and court cards as different or more important than the pips. The trumps are nouns, the court cards feel more like verbs, and the pips are adjectives. We need them all.

Here is something I wrote for another forum, regarding the Court Cards. It can be applied to the trumps too:

For me the cards only become clear in context. The Valet is simply a young man who seem to be offering his baston. In fact, if he is in front of the Royne de Couppes he will be offering that baston, but if he is in front of the Ace of Deniers, he will be planting that baston in the ground. The Chevalier de Bastons seem to be putting a stop to the Chevalier de Coupes' urge to gallop away, but the Chevalier de Coupes brings the ink the Roy de Bastons needs to dip his baston in. The Roy Despee may be ready to take the coin from the Royne de Denier's hand with one sword's single blow, or Royne de Denier may be ready to drop that coin inside the Roy de Couppes Cup. Each character re-contextualizes the one next to it.

When characters from the same suits are together I will see how the element that defines the suit evolves or changes position. Does it becomes active or passive? Is it being used, held, offered? Does it gets more refined, less refined?

When characters from different suits are together I will see how their elements interact. Can one contain the other? Can one subdue the other? Can it make it grow?

When it comes to the individual cards I pay attention to the characters' posture or body language. Not only does it give me an indication of motion -advancing, retreating, stalling- but it helps me describe certain emotional states. For example, Roys and Roynes are always shifting... they remind me of Rodin's theory of sculpture, about how to capture true movement by having parts of a character showing one fraction of a certain motion while other parts of the same character would depict the next fraction of the same movement (he believed this was more accurate than a photographic still image). Neither Roys nor Roynes have their minds and bodies at the same place at the same time, they are always looking ahead, but the Roynes seem to be better at concealing it, while the Roys are clearly revolving on their chairs. They

feel like those kind of people whose body language is easier to 'read', more impetuous perhaps. Roynes are more self-restrained. The only exception would be the Roy de Batons, who seems more in control of himself. Back to Rodin, this difference of attitude between what the Roys and the Roynes transmit, is given by the opposition between the direction of the legs/bodies and the direction of the heads in the Roy de Denier, the Roy Despees and the Roy de Coupes. Both the Roy de Batons and the four Roynes have their bodies facing the same direction as their heads.

I find it peculiar that the only queen who doesn't stare at the object she is holding -the Roine de Bastons- is the only one looking towards the future. (This is, assuming that we read narratives as we read text, from left/past to right/future). All Roys are looking forward, with their objects out of their sight. But the other three Roynes seem focused either on their objects, or on the act of holding their objects. I could see the Roine Despee chasing away the past. The Roine de Coupes feels like she is doing the opposite: she seems to be inviting the past to come upon her. The Roine de Deniers is the one that seems more absorbed by her object. But then again, I can't tell if she is obsessed with it, or offering it to the past. The characters' facial features are open enough to express more than one sentiment by closing a Gestalt with other cards.

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Dear Friends,

I have spent the last couple of days doing nothing and... I have been doing it very carefully! But I wanted to write a few lines to thank you all for this wonderful time we spent together. Getting to share all these ideas and exercises with you has been an enormous pleasure.

Thank you all for the awfully nice comments, and for the enthusiasm you brought into the exercises. It has been wonderful to see you working on them and growing through them. I hope these six weeks gave you the necessary push to develop a relationship with the Marseille tarot that will give you much pleasure and insight in the years to come.

I will post tomorrow, in a new thread, about our reading exchange with the Marseille. That way we will put in to practice what we have started to understand here.

Now I leave you with this little poem:

Stay
by Ingeborg Bachmann

Now the journey is ending,
the wind is losing heart.
Into your hands it's falling,
a rickety house of cards.

The cards are backed with pictures
displaying all the world.
You've stacked up all the images
and shuffled them with words.

And how profound the playing
that once again begins!
Stay, the card you're drawing
is the only world you'll win.

All the best,

EE

Embodied Tarot Course

The basic idea I have been exploring for a while now is that, in a tarot reading, **we use images to talk to the human brain in a suggestive way**. It is for this reason that I devote a big amount of time to understand how the brain works. It is my contention that, if we understand how the brain creates meaning we will be better equipped to talk to it in an effective way. I am going to share now a little bit of what is considered current, up-to-date understanding of the mind via cognitive science. I do so for the sake of completeness, but don't run away, we don't have to 'learn' any of this to work with the tarot.

We are now in a privileged position, in that for the first time in human history we are starting to actually look into neural circuitry and get a factual idea of how thought emerges. What is now being defined as 'Second Generation Cognitive Science' is still in diapers, but there are three main ideas that have been supported by empirical findings:

- **Our mind is inherently embodied**
- **Most of our thought is unconscious**
- **Abstract concepts are eminently metaphorical**

Working with the tarot, the most important of these three ideas would be the first one. The other two are also important, and they have a direct application in readings, but the embodiment of the mind is what will help us approach the tarot images in practical terms. Now, a very important notion here is the theory of *embodied semantics*, which proposes that "concepts are represented in the brain within the same sensory-motor circuitry in which the enactment of that concept relies". In other words, every single thought we have is at also a neuronal pattern we learn, and reinforce, by having our bodies interacting with the world. Since the objective of perception is to inform our actions so we can improve our chances at survival, and since the human brain seems to respond to still images implying motion as if these images were actually moving, describing images as actions is a shorter path to suggest an idea to the brain. This model of thought argues that mental connections are in fact active neural connections. Of uttermost importance for my model is the idea, promoted by many cognitive experts, that *the brain doesn't separate shape from meaning*, and therefore, we must look at each tarot image knowing that the action depicted in it shows in itself its own conceptual intention.

Something I find very exciting about embodied semantics is that it somehow mirrors what I have been talking about for a while now about *meaning being experiential*, in that the meaning of a thing involves how we relate to it, which is another way of saying that everything carries a suggestion. I always say that a chair carries the suggestion of sitting. The theory of embodied semantics suggests that the meaning of 'chair' is whatever a chair can afford us. We learn by experience that what a chair can afford us is precisely a surface where 'to sit'. A lot of these claims have been validated now by recent research on mirror neurons. The evidence that has been gathered via brain imaging suggests that actions and action words share common neural circuits. To see an action, to hear it described, both elicit the same set of responses, which is what in cognitive science is called a 'conceptual schema'. A cognitive Schema is an unconscious set of motions we automatically enact when we are presented with a stimulus. Think of walking, swimming, tying your tie, etc.

At this point, you may be asking: "What has all of this to do with the tarot?" I believe the tarot shows the most direct way for us to understand shape as meaning and to elicit an imaginal response in a person. Palmistry, the runes, playing cards, astrology... all of these share the narrative elements present in a tarot reading, but they ask for more complex analogies. The level of sameness between us and the tarot is literal: **The Magician = a man sanding = you standing**. With more abstract narrative devices, we ought to find a sameness of patterns or a sameness of relationships, which for most people is a harder thing to do.

Now, that imaginal response comes by *analogical thinking*. I believe the tarot is basically a game of analogies and that is what I want to share with you. Every single time we look at the tarot we are engaging in a match of the 'analogies game'. Analogical thinking is now widely studied in cognitive science because it is believed to be the basis for creative thinking. Analogical thinking allows us to use our experience of our own body and map it to events that go beyond 'here and now'. That way we can tap into our previous life experience to solve a problem we are facing in the present. That is also how we can transcend reality and create fiction and art. It is believed that the emergency of this ability as a survival mechanism is linked to the neocortex, that part of the brain that is huge in humans. That's also the 'newest' part of our brain.

I take the tarot to be a late-medieval artifact and in that regard I base my way of looking at it in a couple of medieval notions. One of these notions, that I have discussed before, is the *quadriga exegesis*. Everybody in this forum is familiar with this. Just as any other medieval or late-medieval work of art the tarot can be approached at four different levels of meaning: literal, allegorical, moral and

anagogical. I believe that, in his course, Jean-Michel does a superb job at approaching each image in all these levels. I also find Michael Hurst's work a great approach to the allegorical and moral levels of the trump's sequence. **In my work I stay at the literal level**, and that is the main invitation I extend to you. Approaching the tarot at a literal level implies **describing the images without trying to interpret them**. In my experience, when you describe an image to a person at a literal level, the person's brain initiates a search that is based on these three factors I mentioned before: our mind is inherently embodied, which means that we all have somehow an experience of that action *the main character* in the card is doing. Such search happens mostly at an unconscious level -we can't help eliciting memories, sensations and sensorimotor experiences- and within the same process we map simple body experience into more abstract notions. In other words, what we describe literally is taken as metaphorical by the other person. Take The Tower, for example. If I say that "a structure is collapsing, letting its prisoners free" the other person's brain will try to match these words with people, situations, or events belonging to that person's life. This happens because the tarot brings implicit three main suggestions:

- **It is very ancient**
- **It tells messages**
- **It is about me**

Those three suggestions are present in a person's mind from the start of a reading, and therefore, the person assumes we aren't talking about a medieval tower, but about things collapsing in her life. As I said before, this is deceptively simple. It is also extremely effective, not because we are gifted, psychics, or in possession of an arcane system, but because *we are using the way our brain works*. Trusting that our brain will do what it does best -this is, thinking analogically- should help us dispense with all the nervousness of not knowing what to say when we are working with the cards. What we have to say is right in front of us, in an illustrated script. The hardest part is to let our inclination to think of disembodied meanings go. Here is where I can help, because I have devised a set of keys that help us describe these cards from a phenomenological, visual, or literal point of view. The basis for these keys is **symmetry**. As I posted in another thread, medieval draftsmen made use of visual and conceptual symmetry -understood as resonance or sameness- as a didactic tool that would lead the viewer through a work by detecting both literal and abstract connections. I am always amazed at how interactive this kind of reading was. I am even more amazed at how much sense the medieval use of symmetry makes when we look at it from the point of view of contemporary cognitive science.

Every tarot reading is a game of analogies, and we help the other person make analogies by finding ourselves symmetries among the images and by describing these symmetries to the other person. Since we are basing our work on the fact that our mind is inherently embodied, the most important source of symmetries for us would be the bodies of any of the main characters in each tarot image. I believe I already shared this small key of how to find these symmetries:

Presence is meaning.

*To the left, remembrance, to the right, l'Avenir.
Those who look straight at you are seeing the present.
Fill your head with attention.
Do what the images do, not what they say.
Sit passively, stand receptively and walk actively.
Embody your destination.
Dwell with the sword, build with the wand,
offer a cup, plant a coin.
Let the hands show your intention.
Forget what red is and notice what is red,
stand on a number as you would on a hill,
strip down to your armor;
for what turns gold into lead also turns salt into sugar,
what one step fulfills another could encumber
and what you wear wears you down.*

*Know an image by its friends:
the deepest truths hide in the obvious.*

I will explain these keys in detail, but before I do so, and since I am breaking my promise of keeping the theory brief, I am going to end this post with three little exercises. Please, don't dismiss it, just humor me and tell me which element among the two options in black matches - is like - the red element on top:

Exercise 1:

A

A

or

B

Exercise 2:

D D

P P

or

F G

Exercise 3:

A A

C C

P Q

T Z

or

DD

FG

I want to thank all of you for your attention and interest. I hope some of these ideas are at least intriguing, so we can continue with our work. *I will wait until a few of you answer the exercises to continue.* I am open to any question you may have.

•

Maybe some of you recognized this exercise. It was devised by Sarah and David Premack to test the ability of some primates at mapping analogies. Exercise 1 is quite obvious: the letter A in the second row is like the red letter A in the top row. Here we are right up there with pigeons, monkeys and chimpanzees since all of them can do this kind of pairing. The basic idea here is categorizing. All animals categorize. The classical example in cognitive science is the amoeba, who goes around categorizing things: some things are food, some others are poison (curiously, amoebas don't share with us the idea of "whatever won't kill you will make you stronger"!). We also categorize unconsciously, automatically, every day all the time, and although our categorizations are way more sophisticated than the amoeba, at the very bottom we are also telling apart things that are good or bad for us. In Exercise 1 we categorized by shape: A is like A and not like B. This kind of categorizing is very similar to the one we do when looking for symmetries in figure cards. Both in the trump series and the honors we can look for *visual sameness*. An example would be that blond woman we see in The World and we also see in The Star. The Magician is a man we also see riding The Chariot or between two women in The Lover. We see him too in The Hanged Man. We see a building in The Tower and two buildings in The Moon. We can see the same old man in The Hermit and The Emperor or the same woman in The Empress and Justice. Temperance is an angel, and so is Cupid and that trumpet player on top of Judgement.

I would say that we can stretch that visual sameness to a point in which we assume that all human bodies in the figure cards are 'the same'. Here is where my little poem comes in hand. In order for us to map symmetries among the different body postures we see in the cards, we need some coordinates and I have found three useful ones: **head, body and hands**. All human characters in the tarot have a head, a body and a pair of hands. When we look at several cards together, or at the whole deck, we can say that all the heads are symmetrical to each other, all the bodies are symmetrical to each other and all the hands are symmetrical to each other. All the heads in the figure cards follow into three categories: facing left, facing right, facing forward. We usually

use our spatial orientation to understand time, so we could say that these heads indicate where is the character looking at time-wise: the past is at our left, the future at our right and the present is 'here', represented by these characters that look straightforward. All of the character bodies can also be grouped into three categories: sitting, standing, walking/in motion. In general terms, and based in our own experience, we could say that sitting is a passive action, standing a receptive action and walking, falling, kneeling down, etc, are active. We can't group all of the character's hands into three clean cut categories, but we can see that all of them are holding something (I will get back to that later on). So, when we compare the heads, bodies and hands of two or more characters in two or more cards and we notice in which way are they different, while assume to be bottom-line-symmetrical, we have a narrative. Think about each card as a frame in a movie strip. By comparing how these heads vary from frame to frame we get a sense of movement. That movement is what we describe to the person we are working with. That movement can be mapped, either at a literal or a metaphorical level, to the person's life experience. Each single character in the tarot images is symmetrical to the person we are working with, and -from a narrative point of view- the motion we detect in a row of images is also symmetrical to that person's life. That motion can be at once a message and/or a suggestion. *(My readings mainly consist on describing these movement patterns to people).*

So far we have been talking about the sameness of shape. In exercise 2 we also see how D D is like P P and not like F G, but here we left pigeons and monkeys behind. Only trained chimpanzees can understand this type of sameness that is given in the form of relationships. A D is not like a P, but two letters D and two letters P share the same kind of organization, in which the first letter is like the second one. F G don't follow that organization, so their relationship is not 'first object is like second object' but 'first object is unlike second object'. There is a little cognitive jump from the first exercise to the second one. That jump seems a little big more challenging in Exercise 3, where we see how AA/CC is showing us a 'first object in the top row is like second object in the top row just as first object in the bottom row is like second object in the bottom row'. Here is where things get tricky, in that we don't find that kind of relationship any of the possible answers, unless, we simplify our observation about the initial example by saying that 'the two elements in the top row share the same relationship as the two elements in the bottom row'. In that case, AA/CC are like PQ/TZ. Even when PQ/TZ is telling us 'first object in the top row is unlike second object in the top row just as first object in the bottom row is unlike second object in the bottom row', they are alike to AA/CC in that in PQ/TZ 'the two elements in the top row share the same relationship as the two elements in the bottom row'. I know that most of you chose DD/FG to be more like AA/CC, and the fact is, there are other analogical

mappings we can trace among these elements. What is cool here is that the analogical strategies you choose aren't right nor wrong, but they show how do you think!

*(To explore that a little bit more, here the next experiment for you to consider: if we change **ABC** into **ABD**, how could **KJI** be changed in the same way?)*

I guess you may feel as dizzy as I am after reading that paragraph! So, let me wrap this up for now by telling you that I suspect that the cognitive jump we took from exercise 1 to exercises 2 and 3 is the jump we need to make if we want to use what we have learned from looking at figure cards and apply it to look at the pips. We cannot map our physical bodies to the pip cards in the same way we see ourselves in all the figure cards. Coins, cups, wands, swords... they have no heads, hands nor bodies. So, we need to look at them from one step up in the analogical ladder, by mapping *relationships* and not shape. Take the two of coins for example. A coin is not a person, and we don't even know if it is coming or going. But two coins together relate to each other in a way we can map to human behavior, and therefore, to our experience. Two coins together are in a dialogue, just as two people who aren't too intimate engage in a dialogue: on seemingly equal grounds and from a polite distance. These six cups in the Six of Cups relate to each other in the same way two teams of three people relate to each other when they sit around a table to negotiate. There is more to say about this, but for now please take care of the new exercise and when we are done with that I will expand on this idea.

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The **KJI** exercise was created by Douglas Hofstadter and Melanie Mitchell as part of a series of test for COPYCAT, a computer that solves analogical riddles like this one. Both Copycat and real humans solve these riddles in several different ways. There is no unified 'right' answer because we interpret 'sameness' at different levels of abstraction. Besides the answer you provide, here are some other possible answers:

KJD which would follow the rule: substitute the letter at the right with a D.

KJJ which would follow the rule: substitute the letter at the right with its alphabetical successor. (J follows I)

LJI which would follow the rule: substitute the highest letter for its successor in the alphabet. But since ABC is ascending order KJI is in descending order.

•

I like that exercise because a three-letters sequence mirrors a three-cards sequence. We have a familiarity with letters that is very similar to the familiarity we have with the tarot's images. We know their ordering, their stories (their 'rules' ...), and even when I am proposing that we stay at a literal level, any reading we do of these images is informed by our personal baggage ... There will be many overlaps, but also many differences because, although we all shared the same neural networks, we aren't all wired in the same way. These differences make our analogical mappings different, and different mappings could generate different analogies. I used that tricky exercise to raise this point, so we can take something out of the way right now: there are no 'right' readings. I am not talking about iconography here, since we know that there is enough graphic evidence to narrow down a 'right' way of making sense of these images from a historical point of view. But when it comes to work with the tarot, the issue of being right or wrong simply doesn't apply. I have thought long and hard about this topic because the vast majority of the literature on *readings as a business* comes from conmen and consists in a series of tricks to be played on the client. I am not talking about commercial books published by Llewellyn but about specialized publications. I am convinced that these conmen got it backwards. It is not what they 'do to the client' but what the client's brain does what guarantees the accuracy of a reading. That is why I believe that understanding the brain is more important than understanding tricks, and perhaps, more important than understanding the cards. In a forum like this one, the issue of being 'right' goes just as far as hoping to get the right analogy. I really wish we could get rid of the fear of being wrong so we can enjoy ourselves looking at some images in sequences to show each other the symmetries we see. But in the real world the issue of being right can be seen in broader terms. I know I don't really need to say this here but analogy is also the basis for magical thinking. Every single spell and ritual we find in a grimoire is based in analogical thinking. Magical thinking is brought to the tarot when people assume that what we see on the table actually mirrors real-life in a causal way. The usual way of applying this is in the form of so-called predictions. I hope it is obvious that this is not what I am proposing. In my experience, any level of accuracy in a reading is brought by the client, not by me. Making a mundane analogy, reading the tarot is like eating. Being hungry means that one has a desire for eating that is rooted in a need for proteins, vitamins, carbohydrates, etc. Without getting too technical on diets and dieting, let's just say that chicken would be as effective as pork at eliminating that sensation of hunger. So, if I am a cook and you tell me you are hungry I will give you whatever I cooked. If I have meat I will give you meat and if I have chicken I will give you chicken, because I trust your stomach will find the necessary nourishment for you in it. There is no right or wrong in chicken. Only the total absence of a meal will be wrong.

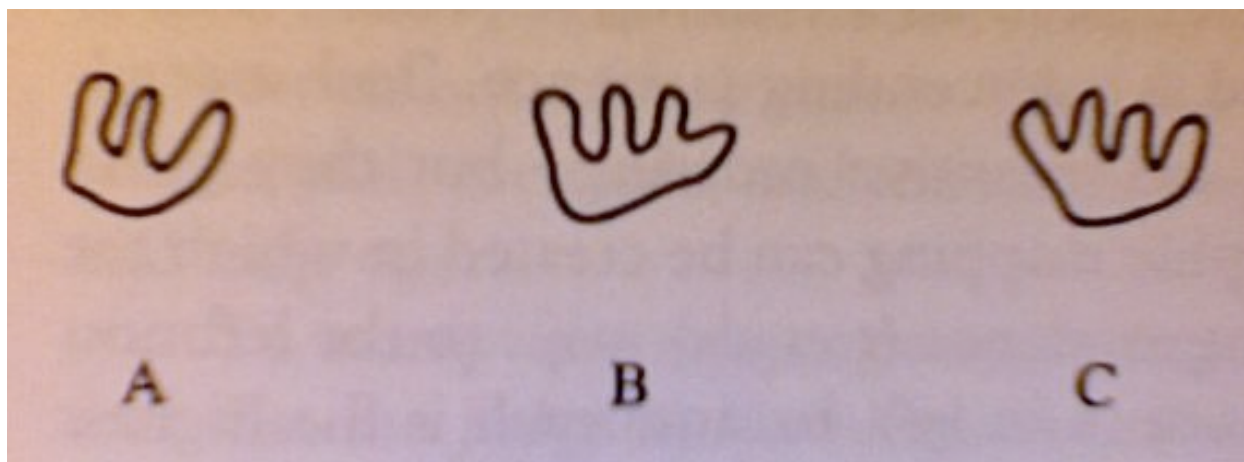
Readings are the same. I will give a person the story I see because that is the one I got, based on the symmetries I can detect and the analogies I can map at the moment. I trust that the person's brain will find the necessary nourishment in it. The only thing I cannot give them is a shrug of my shoulders and a "sorry pal, I see nothing here!". I don't claim to have any gift, I only claim to be good at finding patterns in the cards. This takes a huge way off my shoulders, so I can relax and actually play the analogy game.

Now, the analogy game is really that, **a game**. I love the idea of the tarot being originally a game because I think this is very useful for my readings. I believe that when a person come for a general message, I am inviting her to play a match of the analogies game that consist on "*finding things that feel like you feel*" in the cards. When the person comes with a question, is she who is inviting me to play a match of the analogies game that consist on "finding things that feel like... (include here anything from 'finding a boyfriend' to 'how are my vacations going to go?'). With such specific orientation, the game becomes very easy. In a way, I always feel my client is an Italian lady and I am composing a *tarocchi appropriate* for her.

There is no reason to feel frustrated for not getting an exercise right because eventually there is no way of getting an analogy wrong. Since an analogy can only map parts of a source into a target, they are always partial. What we will find is there is always something else, or something more, to see. The point I was trying to make with part 3 of exercise 1 is precisely that we are great at mapping visual sameness but we aren't that comfortable at mapping relationships among different things and this is the main obstacle we face when we look at the pips. Our second exercise pushed that point further by making obvious that different people have different strategies to map analogies and therefore, no single analogy can be considered to be the right one, even if -in our example- we all share a knowledge of the rules that govern the alphabet. Obviously, our ability for analogical thinking varies from person to person, but in general terms shape-sameness is easier for most of us than relationship-sameness. The cool thing is that, once we are told how where to look, we cannot stop looking. What I would like to propose is that we look at figure cards thinking mainly on shape-sameness, while looking at the pips thinking mainly in terms of relational sameness.

Before we move into some exercises with actual cards, here is a last warming up exercise:

Can you please tell me in which way A is like B, and then, in which way B is like C?



•

That is what we are doing, searching for patterns. The brain abhors chaos. But in my experience, searching for any pattern can be paralyzing. That is why, when working with the tarot images, I have found that the coordinates head-body-hands narrow down the field into patterns that are at once physically understandable and personally applicable.

One little thing. The fact that we can map an analogy is in itself very suggestive to a person's brain. We tend to take any effective mapping as 'true'. The tricky part is that *true* is not the same as *right*. When using analogies in creative thinking, the practical application of an analogy doesn't guarantee success just because the analogy is clear.

•

Both the alphabet and in the tarot trump sequence can be seen as emerging from the way we orient ourselves in space. It is true that we use the 'alphabet rules' to make all these analogies, but these rules emanate from our bodily experience: progressions are pathways, responding to our actual experience of moving in space, leaving things behind while we reach for the next destination. As observers, we tend to map the past to the left and the future to the right, and this gives orientation to the way we read and the way we understand progressions. This is of course a cultural phenomena. It is that experiential knowledge the one that makes possible for us to understand the

idea of going 'forward' as in **ABC**, and 'backwards' as in **KJI**. In other words, we are mapping many of these analogies based on rules that are themselves based on our spatial orientation.

The very act of trump-taking is based on bodily experience, since the main idea of having 'the winner on top' refers to the fact that, in a physical fight, the winner ends in an upright position, while the defeated party lies on the ground, or the winner ends physically on top of the defeated party (although that can also be fun!).

To what extent is this directly linked to mirror-neurons is hard to say. On one hand, mirror neurons have become the easy out for whatever need to be explained about perception. On the other hand, the discovery of mirror-neurons in monkeys and the correspondent research in humans have shown that the same neuronal networks respond -partially or as a whole- when we hear, witness, imagine or enact an action. I believe this is useful in our work with the tarot in that any sequence we can visually verify could elicit the correspondent sense of movement in the other person's brain, just as any action we can describe that can be verified by the other person should elicit the appropriate motor response. The cool thing is that these responses seem to be multi-modal, which means that the elicitation of that motor response should also involve the elicitation of memories, feelings and imaginal responses.

That is why I am convinced that the mere act of describing an image from a literal point of view accomplishes a lot in the other person's brain.

•

That last exercise was devised by a group of psychologists and solved by humans (sorry, no monkeys, chimpanzees or computers this time). Most people tend to see B being like A in that "it has three fingers" and then, B being like C in that "it has four fingers". When A is our reference B seems to be a three-fingered hand. But when C is our reference B is perceived as having four fingers. I like the way this shows how context defines the mappings we do. I find the same thing happening over and over when I look at a three-cards sequence. The image in the middle will resonate with certain parts of the image on the left, and then it will resonate with different aspects of the image on the right. I find fascinating how B can both be like A and C, or in other words, how an image redefines the way we see another image. We can translate that to the tarot and say that one image tells us what to see in another image by uncovering symmetries. (We are all familiar with a very sophisticated example of this in the way Michael Hurst uses The Pope to explain The Devil, based on the symmetry between both cards).

Our cultural bias will have us divining by numbers: we want to have one clean-cut meaning for each card, so we can compose a narrative by connecting a string of meanings. We have been told that this is how the whole thing works. We also cross-reference these prefixed meanings for the cards with spacial meaning in a spread. So, if card 'so and so' meaning 'our home' falls on the 'inner conundrum' position we will now that we are struggling about our living arrangements. I am sure this is an useful strategy to craft stories. Based on what we know about the way our brain processes input, this kind of information will be contrasted with our personal life activating some neuronal patterns. 'Home' could be our actual home, or it could be a metaphorical sense of security. Recalling it will elicit a set of multi-modal reactions and such multisensory information would be the meaning we give to "struggling with our living arrangements".

I have nothing against that but I want to refine the input I give to my clients so the process can be more direct. For example, I have always find puzzling how many people defines The Empress as 'the feminine principle'. Although we can assume that The Empress stands for womanhood -via metonymy- it is hard to grasp what to do if we are told that we got the 'feminine principle' card. This happens because 'feminine principle' doesn't forms a clear image in our minds. There is something fascinating about the way we understand the world: we can only relate with basic categories that form an image in our minds, because those are the ones we have experience them directly. These basic categories are the building blocks of our cognition. Below these basic categories we have sub-categories, even more specific than the basic categories and therefore only recalled by those who are really interested in the given subject. For example, if we take the tarot to be a basic category, the Jacques Vieville tarot would be a sub-category. While the tarot will form a direct image in most people's minds, the Jacques Vieville tarot will only mean something if we know what 'Jacques Vieville' is, which means we have more than the average knowledge in the topic. Think of cats, for example. 'Cat' is a basic category in that it forms a clear picture in our minds and that clear image comes from our experience of cats. In Spanish we have a saying "At dark all cats are brown". A cat is basically a cat unless we really are into cats. Then we will know that a certain cat is an Abyssinian, while another cat is a Siamese, and another cat is a Scottish Fold. Both 'Abyssinian', 'Siamese' and 'Scottish Fold' are sub-categories for the basic category 'cat'. But if cat is a basic category, it can be dumped into a bigger category along with dogs, fish and canaries. That category would be 'pets'. Cats can also be placed into a higher order category along with tigers, lions, cougars and leopards. That higher category will be 'felines'. (In the tarot, if Jacques Vieville is a sub-category, oracles can be the supra-category. We

cannot really form a direct image for oracles in our minds. We need basic categories like tarot, runes, etc to grasp the concept). If you think about it, there is no direct image for 'pets' or 'felines'. We can only relate to these concepts through a basic category. If we are told to think of pets, we will think of a cat or a dog (...or a lizard, if you were one of those kids...) and if we are asked to think of felines, we will think of a lion, a tiger or a cat. We need to reduce general categories into basic categories to make sense of them. Back to the very beginning, we need to reduce whatever we are told to our experiential knowledge so we can understand what it means to us.

The word 'Empress' is a basic category. Incidentally, most names for the tarot cards are basic categories: Star, Sun, Pope, etc. A supra-category for Empress would be 'rulers', another one could be 'feminine roles' (hence the feminine archetype thing) and a sub-category would be 'Catherine the Great'. Since I am interested in an embodied experience I will stick to Empress as my basic category, while noticing that what defines an Empress -or any other figure- in pictorial representation is her body posture. This is as obvious -and we are as oblivious to it- as the smell of our own nostrils. If I ask some of you to draw me a Queen and you draw a woman buying tomatoes on the market I will be puzzled because I won't recognize in your drawing any of the visual attributes of a Queen. We can, for example, say that The Empress has symmetry with the woman in The Star, but we can't really recognize that naked woman as an Empress, because we don't think of Empress as women that go around naked (this is, until Stephanie of Monaco came about). Each one of the characters in the tarot 'behaves' as such character is supposed to behave, and this is a fundamental attribute of their graphic identity.

So, if a person I am working with got The Empress card, I will elaborate on the idea of 'being' -as in mirroring- The Empress. What does "mirroring the Empress" mean? Well, the Empress is most definitively a person sitting down and looking straight-forward at us. So, I would describe the image by saying that The Empress is sitting down in a very steady, almost rigid, way, to keep that crown on top of her head. She is looking straight at us while holding all of her status symbols, her symbols of power. She keeps a firm grip on those things that represent control to her, to the point that I wonder if these things really empower her or if they are truly weighing her down. Notice how, if our work is informed by the idea of mirroring, as in finding the symmetry between ourselves and the image, that description of the image is already providing direct advice that can be understood both at a literal and a metaphorical level. But the most important thing here is that a body-based description of the image circumscribes the card's message to an attitude the person may assume, to face a problem or circumstance, and not to events that will happen to her. What I hope to achieve in a reading is giving the person a visual memory-aid filled with specific

suggestions. This way, when the person is facing that situation she is concerned about, recalling the image -or images- should elicit a series of responses that should help her cope with whatever 'future' she is encountering.

For our next exercise I would like if those of you who are up for it could pull one single card from the trump cycle and describe it at a literal level. It would be great if you can include in your description the coordinates head (looking at the past, present or future), body (passive, receptive, active) and hands (what is the character goal based on what can be accomplished with the object it is holding). If we could all work with the Noblet that would be great, but if you prefer to work with any other deck, go for it.

•

Here in this forum we are looking at these descriptions in the driest possible way, but if we were working with someone who is actually engaged on getting information from the tarot, many of our apparently flat sentences will acquire further depth. This happens because many of the sentences you used in your descriptions can be understood metaphorically. Those interested on further exploring this idea please check *'Metaphors we Live By'* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. They provide an informative list of metaphors and show how they are present in day to day conversation. More important, they show how these metaphors express and construct our understanding of reality.

For example: when we talk about Justice in terms of *"Her expression is both concentrated and vacant"* we are using the **'eyes are containers for emotions'** metaphor. When we describe her as *"looking ahead"* we are using the **'time is a moving object'** metaphor (since we are always paying attention to the character's gaze, these space-time metaphors usually apply). In the Hermit, describing the way he uses his lamp to see could be understood metaphorically either as **'understanding is seeing'**, as in: *"so that the light can travel a greater distance and show him as much as possible"* or as **'seeing is touching'**, as in: **"he is using it -his light- to enlighten the face of another person standing in front of him"**. Most of what Nicole about The Sun card can be understood in terms of the **'emotional affect is physical contact'** metaphor. A lot of the things we say about Death make use of **'personification'**. Personification happens when we understand *abstract notions as persons*. This is very close to what we all have seen as allegorical representations, in which an abstract concept like 'Love' is given a human body, a set of physical attributes and it is called Cupid. Death is another perfect example of this. By describing the way the skeleton works with its scythe, wears a wig, looks at the past, or holds its attention, Robert has

been using personification all along. Obviously, such personification starts when someone decided to illustrate Death by appealing to our human understanding of how we look after we die: a skeleton. Even here death is understood in terms of our own bodies.

Never forget that a description is the most basic form of narrative. By describing something we are telling a story, and as storytellers we can embellish that description as much as our ability allow us to.

Now, if you are up for it, I would like to propose a different exercise. Please take a new card, from the figure cards only (include trumps and honors) and describe as you did with the previous card, but this time, describe it as if it were about Barack Obama.

•

I believe we don't have to actually turn the experience of the tarot into a yoga session. There is good evidence today of how certain circuits in our brain will respond to the description of the action as if we were actually assuming the posture being described, but what you are commenting on is exactly what I am talking about: when we describe these images we experience them. Now, think about how powerful this can be if we are aware of it, so we sharpen our description by including our own memories of having experienced that posture, so the person we are working with can experience it too. Some research suggest that the best way of making a story memorable is by engaging as many senses as possible. Think about it. I don't believe images are just visual input, but multi-sensory experiences. As I said before, *description is storytelling*. The better the description the most memorable the experience for the other person.

Here is where I believe that working with the tarot crosses into the boundaries of hypnosis in that it becomes a tool to impart suggestions that will elicit a psycho-physiological response in the person. Something that is very useful in trance induction, and I believe it to be useful as well in our work with the tarot, is to experience what we are describing so we can describe what we are experiencing. We describe the image, we describe the physical sensations the body posture depicted in the image elicits in us, and that way we make the whole 'story' more detailed for the other person to engage in it. It is my contention that, by doing so, we are anchoring a set of ideomotor responses to an image, so, when the person recalls the image all these responses should be recalled too to give the person the strength or presence of mind to face whatever is concerning her.

•

I just want to share this quote from **Vito Acconci**. I think it fits perfectly the main topic we are developing here:

"Any time you do something, you make decisions about time and space."

•

I got that quote from an interview. Acconci was talking about an old project of his, done many years ago when he was focusing on actions or performance art. He would go out and follow a person around NY. That was his 'action'. Here is the full quote:

"Any time you do something, you make decisions about time and space. I wanted those decisions to be out of my hands. I could be dragged, carried along by another person, I could be a receiver. I could be the agent of the overall scheme, but I didn't want to be the agent of the particular action. I could make the ultimate decision that my space is going to change now, but I don't know where it's going to go."

I like to think this is very similar to what we can accomplish by looking at some random cards. Those characters in the cards are the 'other person' we follow. So, in a certain moment we can be 'carried along' by Strength or The Fool or The Sun. Again, it is not so much about knowing "where it's -the situation/space- going to go" but about making that "ultimate decision" about changing our attitude towards space and time. I find very useful to think of the tarot images as road signs, indications of the upcoming need for us to do one very specific action.

Which takes me to dreams, and your very interesting comment, Patrick. The most interesting -for me- theory about dreams I have read states that dreams are the product of random neuronal firing happening all around the brain that is then organized in a coherent way by our conscious mind. This is like having a collage of images that we then assign a conceptual order. I have always thought that tarot readings are very close to dream interpretation (BTW, that takes me to Robert's very interesting thread on creating a 15th Century divination system. I imagine that a popular application of such system would have to be very close to a form of augury, **as if we were scrying with images**, with the diviner playing a very forceful role and the client playing a very passive role. I suspect that those cartomantic decks like the Sibyllas or the Petite LeNormand -which are such good examples of how one can use of a deck of playing cards to tell stories- suggest very specific mindsets on the expected dynamics within a reading. Although these decks are way more recent than

the 15th Century, I suspect they are build upon the same expectations people doing cartomancy in the previous centuries had.) In the tarot we also have a 'random firing' of images that we proceed to close as a complete gestalt in a conscious way. That 'gestalt sense' is what allow us to describe a dream in terms of how *"my aunt was talking to me... well, first she was my actual aunt and then she was a rocking chair. I just knew that rocking chair was my aunt, who then turned into September's issue of National Geographic magazine."* I am inclined to think that we assume the rocking chair and National Geographic magazine are both incarnations of our aunt because we need to place the whole chain of imagery into a narrative storyline that needs to be kept consistent. So, we define a main character and we keep adjusting our understanding of that main character along the story, no matter how much that main character physically changes.

Now, think about our little tarot cards and notice how, when we look at two or three cards together, we do something very similar to what I just described. If, for example, we define that The Emperor being followed by The Empress could represent a change of focus from the future to the present while still keeping a passive attitude, we will be overlooking all the obvious differences between these two characters in pro of finding coherence. In objective terms, the Emperor and the The Empress aren't the same person. They aren't even of the same sex! But we could make a conscious 'erasure' of their particularities for our narrative coherence's sake. The working principle behind these 'erasures' would be, again, symmetry. We pay attention to these features in these images that are alike while overlooking those features that are different. That is how we could see La Papesse being The Tower, The Pope Being The Devil, or La Papesse, The Tower, The Pope and The Devil being all together an analogical rendition of the person we are reading the tarot for.

I would like to propose an exercise now consisting on three parts. First, take two figure cards, place them together and describe the action you see happening in these two cards. Then, do the same with two pip cards. Finally, do the same by taking three cards from the whole deck, pips and figure cards. In each one of these three cases please use cards randomly mixed and selected.

•

Here is some additional material I want to share with you:

This is one of the coolest experiments I am aware off:

"In Lenggenhager et al. (2007), a protocol similar to that used in the rubber hand illusion (see: <https://youtu.be/TCQbygjG0RU?si>) was extended to the full body. The participant's back (that was stroked by the experimenter) was recorded and projected synchronously or not to a head mounted display (HMD) that the participant was wearing. When participants saw their body in front of themselves, being stroked synchronously with their own back, they felt as if the virtual body was their own (subjective ratings gathered by questionnaire), and mislocalized themselves towards it—i.e. towards the front. In Ehrsson (2007), a similar set-up was used but the subjects were stroked on their chests (hidden from the cameras' view) and saw the stroking in front of the camera, which in the synchronous condition induced the experience of being at the position of the camera—i.e. behind their body (as confirmed by questionnaires and psychophysiological responses to threat.

These two studies suggest that with only slightly different manipulations of how the stroking is applied and projected onto the HMD, aspects of bodily self-consciousness can be shifted in a predictable fashion in opposite directions (Fig. 1A and B). They revealed visual capture by showing that the visual information about stroking dominated over tactile information leading to erroneous self-localization to the position where the touch was seen (Meyer, 2008). This may correspond with either (1) the location of the seen body (Lenggenhager et al., 2007), or (2) with the origin of the visual perspective (Ehrsson, 2007). Accordingly, these data also suggest that self-localization can be experimentally separated from the origin of the visual perspective as well as from the location of the seen body which is compatible with clinical data (Blanke et al., 2004; De Ridder et al., 2007)." (from: Lenggenhager, B., et al. Spatial aspects of bodily self-consciousness. *Consciousness and Cognition* (2008), doi:10.1016/j.concog.2008.11.003)

Which brings to mind Rene Magritte's 'portrait impossible':



And Bruce Nauman's 'Live Taped corridor': <https://youtu.be/9IrqXiqgQBo?si>

•

In my previous post I mentioned Bruce Nauman, an artist that interest me a lot. (It is amazing to think that Nauman with his taped corridor, but also Magritte with his impossible portrait and Acconci with his stalking to people were attempting to address the same issue that virtual-reality experiment addresses: where is consciousness located? What seems uncanny is how they all share the same solution to search for an answer: looking at ourselves from out of ourselves. Just as Magritte was looking at his back in his portrait, any person entering Nauman's corridor was following him or herself. I like to think that, just as Vito Acconci followed other people to let them take charge of his decisions on time and space, we can 'follow' a few images and let them take us away from wherever we are, specially in these cases when we feel as if we are in a ditch, spinning our wheels without getting anywhere.

I grew up with horses, and something you learn by ridding them is that, when the terrain is difficult, you have to let the reins loose. You are 'up there' but the horse has a direct understanding of the terrain. So, you don't try to force the horse negotiate the terrain in a way that makes sense to you. You simply let them take you forward. When we don't know where to go, anything we can use to help us start moving is useful.

This is a quote from Nauman that I believe has to do with your last post:

"The way I worked was by using the tension between two kinds of information that don't quite line up. It is not just the object that you contemplate and experience, it is the object in connection with some other piece of information that you have to deal with".

I think that, in a reading, that "other piece of information" is always there, and it usually takes the shape of these concerns you just mentioned: relationships, health, wealth... We define our lives in terms of these realms, and we have definition of success for each one of them. More important, we assume that happiness depends on us reaching a balanced fulfillment in all those realms. Since perception has to orient our actions towards survival, we scan any bit of information we receive to see in which way it will help us reach that fulfillment. We will use whatever get us going.

In all readings, the reader 'gives' the client a poetic object and the client has to construct a world with it. At the very least, she has to build a piece of her world. But we cannot perceive what we don't know. These pieces we build will always be referred to our personal experience.

•

Do you see the action of closing that happens between the five of coins and the five of wands? If you look alternatively to both images you will see movement, as in the pages of a flip book. That movement gives us a 'closing' sensation, as if the wands in the second image close the field we somehow saw opening in the center of the five of coins. Since there is symmetry between the red center of that middle coin and the red center of the second card, right there where all the wands cross, we could see this as a suggestion to narrow of focus. But The main action suggest a blockage. A blockage that could be overcome by becoming way more precise and fine-tuning our attention.

But that us just my interpretation of the blockage. What I would like to ask is if you, and everybody else, see that blockage, or more precisely, if you can all experience that movement.

•

This is the way I would initially describe these two images:

You got the five of coins and the five of wands. It isn't interesting that you got precisely these two five cards? Fives are right in the middle of the progression from one to ten... right midway... Not at the beginning, not at the end... but deep enough within the process... Here (Tapping on the five of coins) we see four coins perfectly situated in each corner of the image and we are reminded that there was a four of coins before, a moment in which everything was balanced and ordered... Everybody knew his place... In the five of coins a new coin emerges right in the center of the image, and stands there, as if trying to make his mind about how does it fits within the previous arrangement. But of course, it won't. Fitting-in means changing the order of things, even if we don't want to stir the waters. That fifth coin is a newcomer, and newcomers are always seen with a mixture of anticipation, apprehension and caution. We all have been newcomers one time or another. We have all experienced the feeling of being alone in the middle of a room, in that moment in which everybody seems perfectly acquainted with everybody, except for us. Sometimes it is hard to break the ice. Look at how these floral ornaments reinforce the status-quo. These flowers feel like good manners: pleasant but good at keeping us at a distance. They keep everybody separated, or in its place. It is natural for us to keeps our barriers up in our first encounters. But look at what happens next! (Tapping on the five of wands) Those floral ornaments have been crushed in the five of wands, when the four corners of the image come together to join in the

middle. Now these floral ornaments look like if they have been severed! Before, they kept the coins separated from each other, but now the wands are keeping the floral ornaments separated. The wands breached over the flowers to make the tension between the corners and the center more tangible. There is an opening in the five of coins marked by the emergency of the fifth coin, and a closing in the five of coins, here, in this X-shape created by the wands. It is like if everybody came out from their little corner to obstruct that fifth coin's path. But that obstruction isn't absolute. Here, right in the middle, we see the same red we see in the fifth coin. Perhaps this is telling us that in any new situation, we need to sharpen our focus, remain conspicuous, and look for the way in which all the other factors relate to each other. We must learn the steps of the dance so we can join the party without looking awkward or out of place...At that point, what we are seeing isn't an obstruction anymore but a welcoming, for what can initially be perceived as rejection may suggest different patterns in relationship. Sooner or later, the polite 'hellos' will give space to warmer greetings, and what seemed a fixed dynamic gives space to a new structure. Any initial resistance is a natural thing... We are all weary of newcomers, because they challenge our inertia, but as soon as the ice is broken, we can all melt together.

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While looking at the pips, my main strategy is to detect that sense of motion I described above as happening between the 5 Coins and the 5 Wands. If I see the motion -any motion- I can describe it to the client. My main idea is that *the movement is the message*. For me, that movement 'illustrated' in an abstract pattern is akin to the movement illustrated by the character of any figure card.

I know this all sounds rather abstract, but with some practice, seeing the pips moving becomes automatic. From that point on it pays to remember we are telling a story. So, the better we are at telling a tale, the better readers we will be. (Here is an exercise I find useful to 'train' our storyteller's skills: grab three random objects and place them on a table, or pick three random things from around you. Now, try to craft a small story including them. See how far you can take it. At some point, substituting objects for cards becomes very easy)

Then I will pay attention to the narrative suggested by the transformation of one suits into the other one. Going from Cups to Swords suggest transforming the nature of that relationship from agreement to confrontation (again, this is based on the way we experience cups and swords). But going from Swords to Cups would suggest a reconciliation.

I complement that by using more 'mechanical' data, as the numerical order of the pips, by noticing if the progression ascends, descends or forms any other distinguishable pattern ...

It all boils down to understand **the pips as illustrating relationships**, and therefore, asking from us to trace relational analogies between them and whatever is happening to us, more to a client.

•

I am always willing to play, but I don't think my *modus operandi* can help us understand these images. I only hope to provide an useful way to use the images to affect people. So, in practice, my description of any image is never intended to clarify the iconographic or historical aspects of the image, but to promote an action in the person who is listening to me. In general terms I don't believe that fortunetelling - for lack of a better word - is a good prism to understand the tarot's history. But once we are 'here', after three hundred years of 'tradition' linking the tarot to fortunetelling me ought to ourselves to understand the process for what it is, so we can activate it in the most responsible way. In any case I hope that history and iconography could help me better describe the images, but not the other way around.

•

Talking about inspiration, yesterday I had the pleasure of having coffee with Vito Acconci. I already mentioned him in this thread. Acconci belongs to that generation of American artists who grew up in the post-war period and emerged creatively in the 60s-70's. Those are the artists that stood under Pollock and de Kooning's shadows and found their own way by stepping out of it. Something that fascinates me about some of the artists of that generation is that they felt compelled to leave behind the traditional media of artistic expression, like painting and sculpture, and started doing performance art, installations, conceptual art, etc. Incidentally, they were blessed with a generation of gallery owners and art dealers that put up with all the weird stuff they were doing. I believe that is extremely important. Otherwise many of these things would never have happened.

I understand most people resistance to engage with contemporary art, or to even indulge in calling such things 'art', but I believe that the most important thing that happened in the art of the 20th Century was that moment in which the notion of art became extended, so it couldn't be contained or equated to any specific technique

or craft. I like to see in that moment in which artists went straight to explore the metaphorical power of raw matter or simple actions a return to the magical roots of aesthetic experience.

In Acconci's case, he was born and raised in The Bronx, here in NYC, and when the time came to choose a profession he decided to become a writer. He studied writing, but after he came back to NY he realized that the pace of the city wasn't fitted to novels and that kind of literature. He started experimenting with poetry, and with words in the white space of the page, but soon enough he found himself needing to take the word out of the page, and needing to inhabit the actual physical space of the city. This is again what I find fascinating, that moment in which creation takes us beyond of what is known, or familiar to us. Somehow that moment resembles a triple somersault without a net, prompted only by an urge

One of Acconci's first pieces was titled 'Following Piece'. This is the one that interests me the most. It consisted on Acconci following random people on the street. As I mentioned before, he thought that "all decisions we make are decisions about time and space". Acconci decided to transfer these decisions into another person by following him or her, letting that other person take charge of what to do, where to go, and when. I find Acconci's 'Following Piece' to be a very clear way of explaining how is that we can get direct advice from the tarot. Every tarot card depicts some characters doing something, such activity shown by the tarot's character suggests a course of action, an attitude or motion we could imitate. In a way, we can 'follow' a tarot character as Acconci would follow a person on the street. I like to think that such use for the tarot taps both into its historical content as a morality tale and into the experiential nature of its medieval visual language.

As I tend to believe that I over complicate things with my explanations, I find the example set by Acconci's 'Following Piece' a perfectly straightforward one on how to trace a simple methodology to make the tarot simple and useful.

I wrote Vito Acconci telling him I wanted to meet him for coffee to talk about his 'Following Piece' and he was kind enough to agree. I visit him at his studio, a space filled to the top with books, architectural models -Acconci is now focused in architecture- and computer work-stations. Although the studio seems to be fitted to accommodate 20 or 25 people, he was alone in there. On my way there I was a little puzzled at how would he react at the idea of his art being inspirational or thought-provoking for a tarot reader. He apologized for not being in his 'best mood' due to excessive traveling and back pain, but he was kind enough of making some coffee for both of us and we sat to chat. If he really was in pain, or tired, he didn't show it. I

basically told him how his work had helped me to realize that reading the tarot is like prescribing a performance piece to a person, in which the person has to follow the actions and attitudes shown by the characters in the cards. That's it: direct advise, "do as the image does". So, I own Acconci a big deal of inspiration. I wanted to ask more details about his experience following people, so, we talked about that, and about many things, like the importance of 'crossbreeding' or in other words, the importance of getting inspiration from fields that seem distant to our own. We also talked about how he never liked to repeat his performances (and he didn't even liked the word 'performance'), because a big part of what a performance entitles was the 'contract' he made with himself about setting a certain action and carrying on with it. So, for him, most of the performance was about overcoming a fear, to "get it done and get out of there", and there was no point on repeating it. I found that idea of the 'contract' to be an important one.

Because of his background as a writer, Acconci was very interested when I started telling him about the tarot as a narrative tool, and also when I mentioned Italo Calvino and his book on the tarot. He even took notes! He looked at my Noblet with attention and was very interested on the randomness of the cards that come up in a sequence. He had no previous contact with the tarot, which he remembered as 'a thing from the 70's'. I showed him The Fool and told him that every time I see it I think on his 'Following Piece', since the Fool could either be following someone or being followed by someone else. We talked about how people in the streets of New York walks like The Fool: their heads totally focused on the way ahead, their butts naked, at once exposed and oblivious on other people's glances.

At the end of our meeting I asked him to pick a card from my deck and keep it. He told me he didn't want to consciously try to pick one, or he would get trapped in a loop, going through the whole deck over and over forever. So, decided not to look but to pick a random card, and he got... The Fool! He thought it as perfect, and I did too.

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APPENDICES

Tarot de Marseilles Folklore⁴

At some point I started using the word 'folklore' instead of 'tradition', which is the one most TdM enthusiasts prefer, because I saw it as something closer to little bits of gossip than to an organized body of knowledge.

These are things people pass along orally, just as we are doing here. They can't be found in any book.

So, we have the idea that The Fool, being the numberless trump, and XIII, being the nameless trump, are two halves of the same card, two stages of an action: we cut, we move on.

The Hermit is not a man using his latter to look at the past, but a man looking at his lantern, and therefore blinding himself. Light is a metaphor for reasons (so we say "I see" when we mean "I understand"). A man who gets blind by his own light is a man confused by his own thoughts. That is why he has a cane that is bent towards the heart and open to the ground. The cane functions like an stethoscope. The cards would be saying "Behave like a blind man: go by feeling." Then there is the fact that most people sees the hermit as walking backwards. In most decks, the ground he walks on ends under his feet and we have a void behind him. Going by feeling, not by sight, suggests taking a leap of faith.

We see a shadow of the Hermit in Le Soleil. The folklore says that one of these two characters is lending his eyes to the other one, who is blind. The blind character looks to the left, and stands in the same posture as The Hermit.

The folklore also says that the wall we see behind the kids in Le Soleil is the same wall we see in Judgement, only that sen from the other side.

La Papesse is called "la mere du tarot". Not only she looks like a mother superior, but in 'La mere' we hear 'lame air' (card air). La Papesse is "the card of air", because she stares at the empty space before her.

⁴ To me, this lore consists of a series of footnotes added to certain images, without their necessarily being in accord with the image's original iconographic intention. I take that lore to be a fundamental part of the Marseille tradition, and by tradition I mean the narrative/divination use we made of these cards.

People see a choice in The Lovers, but the folklore says the choice has already been made. If we follow the direction pointed by Cupid's arrow we see how it completes itself in the man's hand. With this hand he grabs the woman on our right, while giving a cold shoulder to the woman on the left.

Justice carries around her neck the rope that will be used to hang the hanged man. (In some decks, it is the Emperor who wears it).

I would include the notion of reading the Marseille tarot by observing the symmetry between the details of the cards as part of that folklore. We all want to think this is centuries old, and I wonder if the fact that Paul Marteau relaunched the TdM just three years after Fulcanelli published his *Mystery of the Cathedrals* (1927), teaching us how to read an image like a text, could have played a role in the invention of this "ancient" tradition. Fulcanelli seems to have lifted his ideas about the Phonetic Cabala from Claude Sosthene Grasset d'Orcet, but that is a different line of gossip.

A glance at the tarot de Jacques Vieville

beautifully retraced by Roxanne Flornoy, should make evident how its visual language differs from the tarot de Marseille's. Where the Vieville excels in the intriguing beauty of its individual images, the Marseille pattern shows a poetic consistency that visually links all the trumps.

Look at Le Diable in the tarot de Marseille. Notice how the two slaves chained at his feet rhyme with the two people falling out of the tower. In turn, these two people rhyme with the two streams of water being poured in the star.

We will find traces of that rhyme all along the Marseille tarot, in Temperance's vases, in the twins we see in Le Soleil and in Le Pape, in Justice's scales, in the two horses in Le Chariot, in Le Judgement and in Lamoureux, etc.

Now look at the Vieville. What a devil! Yet the slaves, and their analogical potential, are gone. Nobody falls from the tower, which isn't a tower anymore. Lestaille, the image that inspired Breton to write Arcane 17 isn't there delivering myst. The visual rhymes are gone. (Still, we can't help but see the green foliage in Vieville's trump XVI as the green devil hiding atop a naked tree trunk). The presence of green underlines the symmetry between the devil and the -morning- star, both being also known as Lucifer.

We are missing the trump's names (without words the tarots become dreams, images that glow in rainy days), which we would have found in the Ace of coins and Two of cups, currently not present in this reedition. (In all truth this is inexact. These names have been encoded in the slim layer of air that covers the images, which are all visual puns). This pack is an important visual poem, as it hints at a certain way of playing with the images which would draw a bridge back to Italy.

The tarot de Marseille is all syzygy. In the tarot de Jacques Vieville each card is the clinamen of the previous card.

LE DIABLE

Vieville's devil carries his nieces on his knees, which would suggest he is sneezing.

This pantagruelian devil looks like a genii escaped from Rabelais' "divine bottle", a "bottle divine" or "bottle di vine", the wine bottle (bouteille à vin) which, turned into a demon, seems more like a "whine bottle".

Perhaps the green monster is absinthe, specially because he is about to walk out of the image.

The French "à vin", sounds like "a van" (the creepy van of the pedophile?) and "avan" sounds like "avant", as in "avanti", "adelante" and "avant-garde". (Avant-garde movements have always been considered evil at first). This would suggest that the Devil's claws go forward, just as the Devil's "clause" once we make a deal* with him.

More important, the tip of "garde" is "gar", which also is the beginning of "garra", the Spanish word for "claw", which could be translated as the French "griffe". "Griffe" take us to the Spanish "grifo", either a mythical creature or a faucet. Many cathedrals show devil-mouthed faucets spitting water just as our devil spits fire. Let's not forget that devil has always been a decorative figure!

* "Devil" would take us to "deber" (to owe, to have a debt). The fundamental gesture here is the difference between V and B, which in Spanish are respectively called "V pequeña" (little V) and "B grande" (big B). When we acquire a debt we always think we are getting a little V, but in truth, interest rates would turn that little V into a big B. Such is the nature of making pacts with evil entities.

LA LUNE

In the Jacques Vieville tarot the moon card presents us with the unexpected sight of woman brandishing a spindle.

A spinster?

The word "spinster" would take us to the French "celibataire", which in turns would take us to Marcel Duchamp's bachelor machines and their predecessor, Alfred Jarry's physic-stick (bâton-à- physique). The rotation of the psysic-stick suggests some sort of self-copula (the same entity would enact both horizontal and vertical, masculine and feminine, attributes) which remind us that "spindle", would translate to the French

"broche"; which is close enough to "tourne-broche" or "spit-jack" which, in turn would be contemporary slang of a spit-based hand job.⁵

Another word for "celibataire" would be "Vieille fille" (old maid/maiden) which would suggest that Jacques Vieville (old town) and Marcel Duchamp were the same person inhabiting a multiversal reality in which time is a closet curve, always appearing straight in public. "Spindle" also translate as "fuseau", a synonym for "axe" (axis) which in turn can be relayed to "arbre" (tree) and to "fuseau horaire", which would translate back -or forward- to English as "time zone". Now the significance of the image becomes clear: the moon is a spinster who weaves time by spinning around the world's axis. However, let's not forget that "fuseau" could also account for "ski pants", or perhaps some sky pants the spinster would be weaving at moonlight.

LE FOUDRE

Looking at Trump XVI in the Jacques Vieville tarot our first impulse is to exclaim: "hail!", a German salute inspired by the colorful debris which, in the image, we see falling from the sky.

Then we learn that this trump is called LE FOUDRE, a french word that we could translate as "lightning".

Lightning may be a heavenly response to our (moral/spiritual) lightening. We have learned to read thunder and lightning as Nature's spelling of a Ubuesque "Merdre!", a rumble in the divine belly, a god-like curse. But even when our "Foudre" is coming from "above" we must remember that this French word could also be translated as "chief", or "leader", only as long as we are saying it tongue in cheek, with some irony.

Sometimes, lightning is just a cigar.

Ironically or not, when we experience lightning our heart skips a beat. Perhaps that's why the French expression "ca a été coup de foudre" could be translated as "it was love at first sight".

"Coup de foudre", as in being "hit by lightening", conceals a "coup de fou" (fou = f [feu = fire] + [où = where?] = where is the fire?), as in being "hit by madness"; which

⁵ This notion may be troubling for some, in which case we recommend to use lube.

reminds me that when it comes to lightning I would rather have an "éclair", a puffy pastry that once bitten would be able to "éclairer" (to "enlighten") me, and whose delights would have me turning into a "éclaireur", a "pathfinder". Doesn't "éclair" sounds like "a clear" and "éclaireur" as the Spanish "aclarar*"? That's the feeling of finding, a fine Ding! Ding! Ding! A bell that rings when we commit the fou-leash-ness of falling in love or seeing the light.

* The Spanish word "aclarar" (clarifies) conceals "a Clara" (to Claire). Perhaps trumps XVI in the Vieville pack is telling us: "give an éclair to Claire".

The Subtle Voice of Playing Cards

Look at the four basic elements, or suits, in a deck of playing cards: Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades. If we compare the shape of these four elements paying attention to the solid inkblot shape only, we notice something interesting. The Heart has only one pointed end, the Club has two pointed ends (on the stem), the Spade has three pointed ends, and finally, the Diamond has four pointed ends. Even if this seems capricious it gives us a progressive order, a way to arrange these four symbols in a sentence: Heart-Club-Spade-Diamond. The problem is that we don't know yet what the sentence is saying, because we don't know the meaning of each of these four symbols. And we won't necessarily find that meaning by looking at them in isolation. To comprehend each one of these four symbols we need to see them interacting with other symbols. Here, we leave the Aces behind to look at the Twos.

It doesn't matter if we look at the tarot or playing cards, in a card sequence the Twos express the nature of the interaction among elements. The Twos mark that point in which the symbol becomes part of something bigger than itself. Let's consider Hearts first. The Heart is red. This is not a cardiac muscle. This heart won't get a heart attack or an arrhythmia. This is the heart that can be broken by love and is the aim of Cupid's arrows. It's the heart we have seen reproduced in countless Valentine's Day cards, and countless graphic objects. This is the heart we metaphorically heal with poems, the heart that makes us do crazy things. If we look at the Two of Hearts we see two hearts whose pointed ends are turned towards each other. The fact that each one of them points to the other creates a sense of attraction. Hearts attract each other. We can feel a virtual line running from one heart to the other, a line of 'togetherness'. We can see in this kind of tension a metaphor for connection, and we can extend that metaphor to love and passion. By observing the way these two Hearts behave we understand why hearts are often associated with romantic love, emotions and the social class of spiritual leaders, healers and compassionate people. In other words, Hearts resonate with sublime values. The Heart symbol can be linked to the idea of inspiration.

We have another kind of heart in our deck. Spades look a little like black hearts, and when we look at the Two of Spades we see how the tension between the two Spades in the card is the complete opposite from the Two of Hearts. Spades repel each other. They resemble arrows pointing in opposite directions. We can see in this kind of tension a metaphor for antagonism or conflict. By observing the way these two Spades behave we understand why Spades are often associated with war, enemies,

and the ruling classes. Spades resonate with obstacles and antagonism. The Spade symbol can be linked to the idea of conflict.

A similar yet not identical tension can be perceived in the Two of Clubs, but these two Clubs neither attract nor repel each other. The two Clubs stand one in front of the other. The floral element resembles a 'Tree of Life', or a tree whose branches spread in the same way as its roots. But these Clubs are two elements, not one. Their three petals suggest an unfolding, as if each one of these Clubs were showing off its best attributes to the other one. Therefore, they mirror each other, like in a dialogue or a conversation. This kind of tension can be seen as a metaphor for socialization. By observing the way these two Clubs behave, we understand why Clubs are often associated with work, friendship and social life. By extension, this kind of interaction suggests the link between Clubs and the working class. Clubs resonate with the idea of dialogue. The Club symbol can be linked to the idea of negotiation.

Finally we have the Diamonds. Having four corners, our Diamonds don't suggest any specific direction. In the Two of Diamonds, our Diamonds stand steady in their positions, anchoring the whole composition of the card. These two Diamonds are grounded. In fact, Diamonds are the only elements in our deck that can be assembled to create extended patterns. Four Diamonds together will create a bigger Diamond. Literally speaking, the more diamonds we have, the more wealthy we are. But our red diamonds don't look like gems. They look like tiles. Graphically speaking, the more diamonds we put together, the larger the surface for us to stand on. This can be seen as a metaphor for stability. By observing the way these two Diamonds behave, we understand why Diamonds are often associated with money, richness, and the class of merchants and businesspeople. Diamonds resonate with the idea of reward.

This way, by looking at the symbols we define a sequential order to align them: Heart, Club, Spade, Diamond, and we have also defined a concept for each symbol:

Heart: Inspiration

Club: Negotiation

Spade: Conflict

Diamond: Reward

Our sentence, translated from the four symbols to the four words becomes:

Heart-Club-Spade-Diamond = Inspiration-Negotiation-Conflict-Reward.

Here, we notice the arrangement of the colors on our sentence: RED BLACK BLACK RED. The color red, with its promise of passion and warmth is at the extremes: Inspiration and Reward. We dream of something, we put our heart on it, and we hope to be rewarded by getting it. But black, with its cold darkness, stands between these two very direct notions in the form of Negotiation and Conflict. Being both black symbols we can even fuse them into one single notion: negotiating conflict. Our sentence would be rewritten like this:

Inspiration-Negotiation of Conflict-Reward

Interestingly, both a heart and a diamond are shapes we can recreate on our own by using our two hands. Try it yourself. Your two hands put together can create a very nice heart-shaped space between them, or a diamond-shaped space; but in order to recreate a club, or a spade, you will need at least an extra pair of hands. You will need external help. Try it yourself. Putting your hands together you can create two lobes for a club, but to finish the image another person will have to add the upper lobe and the stem of the club. Same thing happens with the spade. You can create the two lobes of the spade, but you need two extra hands to form its stem. That suggests that the cards typify events that are internal (inspiration) - external (negotiation) - external (conflict) - internal (reward). In other words, our four-symbol sentence is also telling us that in order for us to transform our inspiration into a tangible reward we will need to open ourselves up to the world. Even if we can dream and rejoice alone, we can't thrive alone. The idea this inward to outward and then back to inward cycle, showing what has changed as a result of all our activity, becomes very clear.

In a painting attributed to Giorgione we can read: *INGENIUM NON VALET NISI FACTA VALEBUNT*, "our wit is worthless unless we have the will to work".

Is not that what the shapes of the cards are saying?

But playing cards have still more to say.

Since the deck is composed of 52 different cards, we can go further and deeper. To understand the subtle voice of the cards we need to look at the suit's sequences and the way they behave.

The first thing we notice when we look at the series is that we are working with two different levels of representation: in the number cards we find a very simple, symbolic language, while in the court cards we find a figurative language. There will be a useful understanding we can get from comparing and contrasting a normal deck with a tarot

deck. Everything we have been exploring about the tarot trumps will come in handy in helping us understand the court cards. Conversely, everything we discover about the numerical playing cards will help us understand the tarot pips even better.

Let's look at the number cards.

If we put all our number cards in a row from one to ten we notice a pattern. We go from odd cards to even cards. This pattern brings up a very important feature in our cards: the presence of disorder. There is no story in order. For a story to happen we need disorder. As soon as the general order of things gets disrupted, we have a tale to tell. That is exactly what happens in the suits series. Even cards present a balanced structure that gets unbalanced in the odd cards. Getting a story from one single card may be hard, but every time a new element appears in an odd card it upsets the order that was present in the previous even card. That little transition from card to card is a story and we must acknowledge it and use it as such.

As an example, look at the transition between a Two card and a Three card. Can you see the story there? The new element, right at the center of the card, shares the same direction as one of the two original elements and therefore visually 'teams up' with it. What happens when two are happy and a third one appears? What happens when two disagree and one of them gets a third player on his side? What happens when a third party is called upon by two opposite teams, or when we are forced to choose sides? All these stories are contained in the transition from the Twos to the Threes.

Between a Two and a Three, a whole drama happens. We see the balance between two elements being upset by the presence of a third element. Take a look at all of your two and three cards and realize that what you are seeing is the foundation for most of the good drama in human history from Shakespeare to the evening news. In the transition from the twos to the threes we have all the stories about jealousy, love triangles, alliances made to overthrow governments or to change a company's board. We can see gossip, treason, teaming up and scheming.

We look at the transition between a Four card and a Five card and we see how, when everything is settled and a new element appears, balance gets redefined. Now the new element shares the same direction that two of the two original elements and gets visually grouped with them. Everything gets upset and search for a redefinition. Two factions that may have remained indifferent to each other up to that point start their bidding to attract the newcomer's attraction or loyalty. A new kid in the school chooses a faction over another one, a political candidate is lured by two financial groups, we arrive late to a party and we don't know in which side of the gossiping we

may want to fall. All these stories, and many more, are present in the transition between a Four card and a Five card.

Looking at the pip cards from one to ten we also notice that the cards in the sequence get progressively heavier. This is, the amount of black, or red is increasingly higher in each card. I mean this visually, of course, although I bet we could weight the Nine of Diamonds and find out that it is literally heavier than the Three of Diamonds! In any case, the higher the number, the heavier the card, with a higher amount of red or black on its surface. This is the way the cards have to tell us how intense things are getting. We don't need numerology here. The cards are there to be seen, and it would be by looking at them that we will extract all the information we need. From one to ten Inspiration increases, Negotiation gets more intense, Conflict hardens and our Reward gets more substantial. In other words, the cards show a visual progressive rhythm that can be followed. This rhythm is a message in itself.

Chance will make sure we won't always get our cards in order. That's why we must look at our cards and detect a rhythm in the sequence. We look for the rhythm while disregarding which symbols we get. The progression in the cards that shows up in a given reading will either be getting more intense, or they will be getting less intense. That way we know if the rhythm is expanding, or if the rhythm is contracting. Usually we would think that expansive rhythms are good news and contractive rhythms are bad news, but in truth that would depend on the question we are asking. Also, we will see that our rhythm could get contractive or expansive in a direct way, or it could fluctuate. Having a Two of Clubs, a Six of Spades, an Eight of Spades and a Nine of Hearts would indicate a direct, expansive rhythm. Having a Five of Hearts and an Eight of Diamonds would indicate a fluctuating rhythm which overall can be seen as expansive.

The cards present multi-layered levels of meaning. We must learn to look at them separately, and then, we must know how to put it all together.

The LeNormand and the Tarot

I guess the main difference between these cards and tarot is that the symbols, as presented in the LeNormand system, have a pre-fixed set of meanings; while each tarot card is a process, always evolving. Of course this doesn't have to be that way, but it seems to be the tendency, at least in the way we are taught the system.

I have found that the symbols of the LeNormand deck are present in several dream dictionaries from the 18th Century, almost with the same meanings. More interesting still, some of these symbols, or variations of them, are present on the "Tuphele" the carved figurines that, along with bones, claws, seeds, etc, are part of divination baskets in Central and South central Africa.

I am very fond of the LeNormand deck, but for me it is more than a specific oracle. I see those cards as training wheels for the comprehension of symbols, that then you can find, and read, everywhere: dreams, nature, the city, a table at a restaurant, a memory... In my view of things, all oracles are models for the human mind, and in that sense, the LeNormand deck is among the clearest ones.

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I don't think that the way we approach the LeNormand deck has to be different from the way we approach Tarot; but I can see that LeNormand cards are taught, or their meanings pass down from person to person, as fixed symbols. Of course, this doesn't have to be like that. There are also people who have closed, limited, meanings for tarot cards. Yet I feel that it is easier to see a process in Tarot cards, and a symbol in each LeNormand card. And here is why: Tarot is an optic language, while LeNormand cards are a symbolic language. You don't really LOOK at the LeNormand cards, you work with the symbol you are given. This makes it harder to find evolving meanings on the cards (and this is also what makes LeNormand cards so precise). Now, in tarot we can look at the cards, and every time we look at them, we can focus on something different. We don't just grasp "The Hermit" as a concept; but as a process, or energetic imprint. Sometimes we are the Hermit's staff, Some other times we are the Hermit's lamp. Some times we are the old guy who is getting into a cave, and at some others we are the master that is coming out of it. It is harder to find a natural tendency to approach LeNormand cards in the same way. It isn't that we can't, it is just not that natural. Perhaps, and I am not sure, LeNormand cards are closer to ideas in a Platonic sense, while Tarot cards are a thing by themselves, not a representation of a thing.

Most of the time I just read ONE tarot card to a client. I am not saying this is better. It is just something that makes sense to me. I often think that tarot cards are so rich and complex that trying to focus on more than one during a reading is overkill. This is of course just my personal opinion; but think of the pleasure you receive from looking at one painting from your favorite artist, and contrast that with how exhausting it becomes to look at an entire retrospective in a museum; and how much detail and layers of meaning you miss on each painting, as soon as you are invited to look at more than one of them at once.

So, with LeNormand cards I usually read several of them on a row. With tarot, I may do so, but often I do this:

Take one card selected either consciously or subconsciously by your sitter (defining the pros and cons in each case is up to you), and have her look at the card.

- Ask her to describe to you what is happening in the card. Pay attention to the way she perceives the card, to the order in which she recalls the entire image, and to the elements she decides to focus on, or ignore.

- When she is done, ask her to close her eyes and describe the portion of the card she remembers better. Ask her to get into the card, as if the cards were a dream, and to look around for an interesting spot to stay. Instruct her to stay at that specific spot and let her mind drift, letting that spot in the card bring any image, feeling, or emotion to her mind. (Here, you can enhance this relaxing state by drawing from Ericksonian techniques. Notice how your volunteer's body reacts to the experience, and feed back her reactions as a confirmation of her deeply experiencing the dream in the card.)

This will allow you to do an entire reading using only one Tarot card. Consistent with Tarot's analogical nature, the card would be a doorway, a dream that opens the door to other dreams. (BTW, the inspiration for this comes straight from Arnold Mindell's Process work. You may like to read Mindell's "The Dreammaker's Apprentice". Even when what he describes are techniques for Process-Oriented Therapy, I have found in that book a gold mine of ideas for divination).

Now, one of the reasons I do this, is because I am interested in the idea of Tarot cards being a map of the Universe's energetic imprint; which may be another way of saying that they represent a structure for our unconscious mind. My objective as a diviner tends to be to detect the energetic imprint I get from my client at that given time.

Sometimes I am even tempted to imagine that one given Arcana is "possessing" the person, in a similar way African Orishas ride on people. But again, you may be experiencing the process of "finding your own way"; and we may say that this is represented by The Fool. But within that process, you aren't just The Fool. Perhaps you are now the Fool's eyes, which are looking ahead. Perhaps you are the fool's shoes, actively moving forward. Perhaps you are very aware of that dog/cat scratching the back of your legs, since the people you love doesn't understand your choice of path, and having them gossiping hurts you... Tarot cards are an extraordinary visual aid to explore in depth the specific energetic imprint of our sitter. On the one hand, you can go deeper in the card and find an entire universe of symbolic imagery (and entire LeNormand deck?) in just one corner of it. On the other hand, when you see one card you are seeing part of a process. We can assume that, after your energetic imprint has taken the shape of The Empress, it will mutate into The Emperor, then into The Pope, and so on. This helps us, not to tell the future, but to talk to our sitter about the tendencies that may be modeling the way she approaches her future. I find it easier to see this whole energetic structure in tarot, than in LeNormand cards.

But overall, the most important thing I came to realize working and comparing different systems, is that all oracles are models for the human mind. All oracles are training wheels for us to understand the unconscious as an oracle. This isn't a notion I want to impose on anybody, just the one that works for me. So, one day, while studying an African friction oracle in which you hve to imagine several answers and wait for a signal to point you the right one, I thought: "what if, instead of shuffling cards with her hands, I have my sitter shuffling images with her mind?"

So, now, I rarely use cards. I still keep my Marseilles deck in my pocket, but I see it more as a book I quote than as an oracle, and I prefer to read minds. I don't mean telepathy as we see it in movies, I mean reading a person's imagery as if it were, perhaps, a LeNormand deck. :-) Knowing that this segment of that person's imagery I am reading today is part of a bigger whole, from which Tarot is a map. It is said that Imagery is the Sixth Sense, so I have programmed my imagination to show me symbols around the people who are in front of me. Imagery is the universal language of the brain. So, my imagination uses symbols that represent what is going on in these people minds and lives. Exploring these symbols I can define what is troubling people; but symbols are also a type of message and just as we all intuit that each problem contains it's own solution, these symbols give me a possible answer for what is troubling you. That's what I do.

Here is something else I wrote for my web site, and it isn't there anymore, but serves to illustrate my feelings:

Among the many Divination systems from Africa, there is one which captures my imagination like no other. The diviner shakes up a basket filled with small objects and examines those which end up on top. They look for both their specific meanings and at the relationships between them. In the words of anthropologists Filip De Boeck and Rene Devish: "This method of divination consists of an open analogical system in which use is made of a varying set of figures (L: atupeel, atupeedi) and substances of animal and vegetable origin (maamp ma ngoomb). These objects constitute the content of the divination basket. They are tossed up (L: -sukul, -sekul, -eehul) by the diviner (L: -mwiin kupoong) in changing configurations. The objects thereby function as expedients for the diviner in his search (L: -soot, -eengul) for the what, the who and the why of the illness, misfortune, or death. The Luunda verb - eengul refers to the decanting of palm wine to separate the good wine from the sediment. In an analogous way the diviner separates the relevant from the subordinate data in his search for all the ins and outs of the affair which is presented to him."

It is precisely this idea of "decanting" that inspires me. I believe that the diviner's basket is a beautiful model of the human mind. Our minds are also filled with 'bones', 'roots', 'figures' and 'claws', that we group under the label of memories, feelings, desires, fears and dreams. By the use of certain processes, either purposeful or accidental, the contents of our minds are reorganized and reoriented, "decanting" those symbols that we need in a given moment, from those we don't.

I see my work consisting of shaking people's "basket".

The Default Library

Valuable books for students of Tarology:

- *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* by Italo Calvino
- *Arcane 17* by André Bretón
- *Nadja* also by Bretón

(A true treatise in coincidences)

- *The Mystery of the Cathedrals* by Fulcanelli.
- *Pataphysics, The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* by Christian Bök.

(This flimsy book may be hard for some, but not only it is the best introduction to pataphysics I have read, it also sees it through three literary movements).

That is my default library. I am sure some others will come to mind.

My other suggestion to anyone wanting to perfect the craft of describing the cards is to read poetry. All kinds of poetry. Poetry is condensed language, and in that regard, very closed to the experience of looking at the tarot. It is good to see how each word can become a stone we throw in a pond, causing many ripples.

ADDENDUM

Taroloyeast: A Practical Guide to Enrique Enriquez's Tarology by D.M.

"A tarologist is someone who gets the gist of tarology. A taroloyeast is the one who, by turning words into images, has his semantic field fermenting. A tarologist creates the conditions for that anomalous moment when chaos makes perfect sense. The *gist* of the yeast is to re-create language." ~ Enrique Enriquez, *Tarology*, p. 10

Tarology is likely one of the strangest and most unconventional books that you will ever encounter on the subject of the Tarot. Whereas most people who own a copy either don't seem to read it or perhaps simply don't understand it, no one appears to put it into practice. It is my contention that *Tarology* is not merely a book of theory capable of being read and understood, but a practical manual of visual and linguistic alchemy that has the possibility of completely transforming your relationship to the Tarot and to language. This became abundantly clear to me over time as I worked with Enrique through several of his courses, became familiar with his writings on various subjects, and studied numerous artists and poets that he recommended and referenced as formative influences upon his work.

My biggest breakthrough in understanding *Tarology* came when I was exposed to Alastair Brotchie's *Book of Surrealist Games*. In the Introduction, Mel Gooding wrote that

"Surrealist games and procedures are intended to free words and images from the constraints of rational and discursive order substituting chance and indeterminacy for premeditation and deliberation. Surrealism takes the logic and continuity of the dream to have a truly given significance, equaled only by the revelatory power of the unexpected analogy, the marvelous conjunction ... *I madly love everything that adventurously breaks the thread of discursive thought and suddenly ignites a flare illuminating a life of revelations fecund in another way* wrote Andre Breton. Such 'chance encounters' transgress deductive laws and transcend the logical systems of classical rationalism."

One could easily substitute Tarologist for Surrealist and Enrique Enriquez for André Breton in the above quotation to walk away with an accurate picture of the scope and intentions of *Tarology*. Of course, Enrique looks not to Surrealism but its cousin Pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions, to be the flagship movement

informing his series of Tarologist games. "The imaginary solutions contained in the Tarot," he wrote, "intend to give you the means for sabotaging reality through poetic action." Enrique uses the Tarot like a prosthetic imagination, putting the subversive activities of the Surrealist poets within reach of anyone in possession of a deck of cards.

While there are some purely literary productions in *Tarology*, the heart of the text is a series of operations or exercises with the examples being prefaced by instructions. If you engage in the activities yourself, you will be practicing *Tarology* rather than simply looking at and being mystified by it. I will highlight some of my favorite activities below but I also recommend taking the time to read the entire book.

Follow Grasset d'Orcet's gesture of decoding. (p. 78)

In section 10 of "Reading the Marseilles Tarot: The Science of the Circumstantial" (*Tarology*, p. 77), Enrique introduces the imagery of a brick wall with some loose bricks the movement of which offers a glimpse into the world beyond the wall. This is used as an analogy to illustrate two approaches to reading the Marseilles Tarot based on *la langue des oiseaux*. The first is the Gesture of Decoding associated with Claude Sosthene Grasset d'Orcet whose principle linguistic method consisted of "scanning the text and choosing words with homophonic potential, so their sound can suggest a different arrangement, a new sentence, that will have him discovering a new meaning within the text."

Applied to the visual context of the tarot, he states that "the tableaux conformed by the cards seems to us like the brick wall which, being already there, is inviting us to find the loose bricks" that connect all three images. Once we have detected them, the pattern created moves to the foreground and becomes our message.

[quote]"This methodology is fairly consistent with the mechanics of a classical tarot reading: given a random selection of cards we would impose the grid of our personal concerns to it, until some of the symbols start clicking and we perceive a message."[/quote]

Here is an example using the Dodal:

Will I have a good change in my life next month?

2 DE EPEES / LEMONDE / LE•DIABLE

The flower turns into a person turns into a devil. The swords turn into a wreath turn into two chained imps. In the 2 DE EPEES the flower attempts to blossom amidst the barbed wire. It becomes accustomed to this environment and takes on the semblance of humanity while the harshness of the environment, through adjustment, becomes blossoms instead of barbs. In LE• DIABLE the woman is released from captivity and free to run wild. According to la confrérie, this change may be personally initiated at any time.

Follow Roussel's gesture of the poet. (p.78)

In section 10 of "Reading the Marseilles Tarot: The Science of the Circumstantial" (Tarology, p. 78), Enrique introduces a second approach to reading the Marseilles Tarot based on la langue des oiseaux referred to as Raymond Roussel's gesture of the poet. In addition to the intrinsic merit of his literature, Roussel became famous for the posthumously revealed method that he used to craft his novels. He would use the homophony of select terms to connect the opening and closing sentence of a story, then craft a narrative that ties them together. Applied to the tarot, it is possible to construct a sequence of cards that uses the same narrative pattern. The procedure is as follows:

1. Begin by selecting one card from the deck.
2. Next, go through the whole deck and using visual symmetry and the synonymy of gestures or wordplay based on naming the elements of the card and exploring anagrams and homophones, find a card that contains a connection to the first one.
3. Repeat this procedure, selecting a third card that shares an element in common with the previous two.

Here is an example using the Tarot of Jacques Vieville:

VI - X - XIII

Beginning with AMOREVX we can also hear the words AMOUR EAUX, meaning love and waters. These words evoke the beautiful CESTE DAME, pouring her heart out into the VASE. The word VASE in French means silt or mud deriving from the Dutch WASE meaning wet ground. With this image we might imagine the middle figure of AMOREVX being supported on either side so as not to lose his footing upon the wet earth. These cards may be connected by the river that runs beneath the Water Wheel.

Read the gestural language of the trumps. (p.84)

One of the most important instructions of the book is included on p. 84 as *The Tarot: A Gestural Language for the Common Man*. This document summarizes within a pithy poem the language of gestures communicated by the figures depicted on the cards. According to the note appended to the text, "Those of you with a sharp edge will find in it all the necessary keys to decode the Marseilles tarot's gestural language."

I first encountered the text in the little white book accompanying Flornoy's Dodal and then again here in *Tarology* but I initially didn't quite know what to make of it. The text started to become operative for me during Lesson 5 of Enrique's Pips course where the practice of reading figures is introduced through the consideration of the court cards. It was here that I learned how we read the images of figures with our own memory of the experience of inhabiting a body and that our translation of this experience into words naturally contains a metaphorical potential that can form the basis of a message. By the time I started his Trumps course the familiarity of these principles really started to hit home and my intuition was corroborated when we started to work directly with the text in Lesson 3.

Here is the entire text as it appeared on the Tarot History forum:

The Tarot: A Gestural Language for the Common Man

Presence is meaning.

To the left, remembrance, to the right, l'Avenir. Those who look straight at you are seeing the present. Fill your head with attention.

Do what the images do, not what they say.

Sit passively, stand receptively and walk actively. Embody your destination.

Duel with the sword, build with the wand,
offer a cup, plant a coin.

Let the hands show your intention.

Forget what red is and notice what is red,
stand on a number as you would on a hill,
strip down to your armor;

for what turns gold into lead also turns salt into sugar, what one step fulfills
another could encumber

and what you wear wears you down.

Know an image by its friends:

the deepest truths hide in the obvious.

Enrique provides an extensive commentary on the text containing an elaboration of the science behind bodily metaphors in "Embodied Tarot: When Medieval Draftsmanship Mirrors Cognitive Science" that was published in the Fourhars Tarot Studies Newsletter. I am always interested to learn how this teaching has affected the experience of those previously informed by other approaches.

Here is an example using the Dodal:

IVSTICE / IMPERATRIS / LE•DIABLE

The figures with their crowns and wings seems to repeat each other throughout the sequence. Here the glance of the Empress takes center stage. It is as though the she is imagining her future, binding and obstructive, if the rigid posture and balance of Justice is sustained. She looks forward into the future, sees more of the same, and feels stuck. These cards seem to insinuate the need for a tipping of the scales.

Turn the trumps' names into images. p. 89

In "Visual Teaching: The Trumps," beginning on page 87, Enrique describes a method of turning the letters of a word into a visual meditation by focusing on their individual shapes and allowing them to spontaneously evoke images.

This chapter contains a full development of the operation applied to the trumps' names from the Tarot of Marseilles of Jean Noblet. Each name is divided into a soul (the vowels) and a body (the consonants). Each of these sequences is then meditated upon separately, in relation to each other, and in relation to the images of their corresponding cards.

The following are some particularly instructive passages from this chapter describing the nature and significance of the procedure:

"We can explore any word by looking at its soul and body. This way, a word becomes more than the sum of its parts and gets turned into a meditation. In this little game, and in the game of tarot as well, it will be more useful to look at the shape of the letters than to focus on concepts. The secret is to let spontaneity regale us with a direct comprehension." (pp. 88-89)

"In our game with letters, we aren't decoding any secret. We are just playing with shapes to see where they will take us, knowing that they will only take us as far as the image itself will allow. The image on the card becomes the foreground of the card's name, so we can explore the rhymes and resonances that occur between text and image. If we indulge in this silly little game of reading the names of the cards as images, we run the risk of finding something we aren't looking for. That's just what we want. How much can we understand about a card by looking at its name? How many times can we find our Bateleur in the word 'bateleur'? And then what else will we find there?" (p. 94)

"Our game is very close to la langue des oiseaux, the language of the birds, without claiming to actually employ it. The only certainty we have about la langue des oiseaux is that it invites us to imagine that things can just be what they seem to be. I like Jean Claude Flornoy's definition of la langue des oiseaux as a language that functions through 'spontaneity and direct comprehension.' But the true intent and secrets of this language are lost to us. We have forgotten it. Forgetting is a way of dying, and we can say that the language of the birds is a dead tongue. Here, we are trying to revive it a little by making one major shift: we ignore the sound of the letters. In our view, they have become graphic objects. Why? Because the letter AA that a Frenchman pronounces is not the same as pronounced by an Englishman, or the same letter A a Spaniard pronounces; but all these letters A look the same. This gives us enough common ground for playing with the shapes of letters, turning words into meditations." (pp. 96-97)

The chapter provides a meditation on each of the names of the 22 trumps of the tarot of Jean Noblet. Due to the nature of the exercises, these are comprehensive without being exhaustive, so it can be potentially fruitful to revisit the same names. At the same time, there are enough differences in spelling among the Marseilles and other iconic decks to achieve unique experiences with each variation.

Here is an example using the Vieville:

XVI LA FOVDRE

Soul: A O V E

Body: L F D R

These sequences of letters present a nearly perfect correlation to the images on Trump XVI.

The soul of the name resembles the posture and qualities of the man who stands upright with his feet drawn apart like the letter A. He is presented with an awe-inspiring mystery that leaves him vacuous and void like the letter O. His arms are outstretched in the shape of the letter V which is also a U, demonstrating his receptivity to the spectacle taking place overhead just as he engages all aspects of his being - the letter E as head, heart, and body - to the experience.

The body of the name resembles the Tree. The letter L is the roots expanding toward the ground and F its branches reaching toward heaven. The letter D is repeated in the clouds, pregnant with moisture. Lightening erupts from them, giving rise to the letter R.

Considered emotionally, these letters and images evoke the feeling of standing before an abyss, becoming totally receptive to the influences descending from above and pressing forward with every aspect of your being. The feeling of groundedness is balanced by a redoubled effort of expansion toward the moist open air which erupts into joyous vitality.

Turn playing cards into a thermometer. p. 130

On page 130, Enrique provides the poetic summary of a set of coordinates for the examination of playing cards. Students will clearly recognize it as basis of the SAY A PIP course. There is no associated explanation for the text aside from the suggestive subtitle in parenthesis, (learning social sculpture from a Hare), a reference to the art of Joseph Beuys. According to the Tate Museum description, Beuys' theory of Social Sculpture is "based on the concept that everything is art, that every aspect of life could be approached creatively and, as a result, everyone has the potential to be an artist." The hare is a recurring theme in Beuys' work, including his famous action 'How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare' where he exhibited himself in a closed gallery with head covered in honey and gold leaf discoursing with a dead rabbit.

According to Beuys,

"For me the Hare is a symbol of incarnation, which the hare really enacts something a human can only do in imagination. It burrows, building itself a home in the earth. Thus it incarnates itself in the earth: that alone is important. So it seems to me. Honey on my head of course has to do with thought. While

humans do not have the ability to produce honey, they do have the ability to think, to produce ideas. Therefore the stale and morbid nature of thought is once again made living. Honey is an undoubtedly living substance human thoughts can also become alive. On the other hand intellectualizing can be deadly to thought: one can talk one's mind to death in politics or in academia."

The subtitle suggests that Beuys insights into social sculpture can be incorporated into our work with playing cards and by extension, with the Tarot, and that this may be a means whereby dignity can be given to an otherwise trivial pursuit. In the *Marseilles Seekers Course*, Enrique greatly elaborated upon this connection to Beuys work as follows:

German artist Joseph Beuys defined five processes - grouping ten qualities for matter into binary opposites - he used to craft his sculptures:

ORDER-CHAOS
DETERMINED-UNDETERMINED
ORGANIC-CRYSTALLINE
WARM-COLD
EXPANSION-CONTRACTION

The bridge between any of these bipolar opposites was the concept of movement, which Beuys defined as: the artist's will at work, or, the channeling of organic energy.

I find interesting the use of the word movement as a substitute for change. Change is a word that makes people nervous, but movement has no such negative connotations. The artist as an agent of movement, or the diviner as an agent of movement, is a very attractive proposition ...

For Beuys, part of the process defined as 'a sculpture' occurred when matter moved from one of these estates into its opposite. Here, it is important to notice that Beuys used very raw, time sensitive, materials in his work: iron, copper, sulphur, fat, honey. Under specific circumstances, the artist's will, defined by Beuys as movement, will transform the sculpture's materials, taking it from one extreme to its opposite within the aforementioned bipolar opposites. (If we think of fat, for example, we will see that fat will naturally melt, becoming warmer, of a further undetermined shape, in a chaotic, organic, expansive way.)

Something very interesting is that most of the time, such materials were used as metaphors for these processes. This is, the transformation would be hinted at by the material's own nature. The idea was to elicit in the viewer a certain feeling, or revelation.

Quite magical.

This interests me because we also work with 'raw', time sensitive, material: we work with people. The interesting thing is that these five bipolar processes are also metaphors, and a peculiar characteristic of these metaphors is that they have a dynamic quality. These are catalyst-metaphors. They suggest an action. So, we have a set of ten metaphors, grouped in binary opposites, and just as Beuys used these processes to modify matter, we can use them - as metaphors - to describe a person's situation and to suggest a certain movement towards its bipolar opposite. A person could be crystallizing, therefore needing to become more organic. A person could be expanding, therefore needing to contract. A person could be cold, therefore needing to warm up, a person could be in total order, therefore needing to break onto chaos, etc.

How do we know whether a person is contracting, expanding, etc?

That is what the pips are telling us.

When we look at the pips we can always notice if the sequence goes from ORDER to CHAOS, from DETERMINED to UNDETERMINED, from ORGANIC to CRYSTALLINE, from WARM to COLD, or from EXPANSION to CONTRACTION. In broader terms Wands and Swords contract - in that they evolve by generating a solid shape in the middle of the card - while Cups and Coins expand - in that they spread across the card's surface - Even so, we can see that Swords are expanding if we compare them with Wands, and we can also see that Coins have a particular point of view that makes them expand over a horizontal plane, while Cups 'pile up' or expand on a vertical plane. All these are indications of movement, and such movement will give us, by analogy, an insight into the process a person is experiencing.

Shape becomes meaning, rhythm becomes message.

Here is the full text of the chapter in Tarology:

how to turn a deck of cards into a thermometer

(learning social sculpture from a Hare)

red is warm
black is cold

1 is contracted
10 is expanded

from 1 to 2 or 3 things go slow
from 1 to 6 or 9 things go fast

pips are patterns
courts are people
pips are inner
courts are outer

all that falls between
"Once Upon a Time" and "Happily Ever After" is about going

from warm to cold
from cold to warm

about contracting if you have expanded
about expanding if you are contracted

because you are a lump of clay
(and I mean it nicely)

Here is an example using playing cards:

Will my name influence the person I will become?

4 of Hearts - Ace of Clubs - 6 of Spades

The substance cools quickly as it contracts and remains cold while expanding quickly again. The pattern suggests a turning point in the process of becoming. There is a winding down in the contraction from 4 to 1 followed by a building up from 1 to 6. The warmth suggests the influence that your name had early in life. This influence quickly diminishes during the initial stage of winding down and does not re-emerge following the period of transition. Who you ultimately become in the expansion from

1 to 6 will not likely be due to its influence. The sudden absence of influence may even suggest that you will take on a new name and rebuild yourself around the assertion of a different identity. This scenario has many possibilities including adopting a new surname through marriage, assuming a new role through parenthood, a new job title or position, a baptismal or initiatic name, or even a particular nickname that gains prominence within your sphere of acquaintances.

Translate a word into a sequence of cards. (p. 135)

In *La Conspiration Alphabétique* (p. 134-136), we are presented with a method of expanding a single word into many words through the medium of the tarot. According to the text,

“If we understand poetry as the realm where language is re-created, we will see the Tarot as the ultimate poetical machine, for it allows us to operate outside the frontier of language by decomposing words into images, so the semantic field of our original words get expanded by absorbing the semantic fields of all the words included in these images, once we translate the images back into language.”

The procedure is as follows:

1. Select any single word.
2. Using the table of correspondences below, translate the letters of the word into a sequence of cards.
3. Translate the sequence of cards into many other words.

Here is one of my examples:

LOVE

(L) Lermite + (O) Ace de Baton + (V) Lestoille + (E) Ace de Epees

A lonely old man stuck in the memory of his past, is offered a blazing branch, that allows him to let go, giving him a new will to live.

(This is the associated table based on the Noblet.)

a = Ace de Deniers

b = Ilbateur
c = La Papesse
d = Lemperatrise
e = Ace de Epees
f = Lempereur
g = Le Pape
h = Lamoureu
i = Lefov
j = Lechariot
k = Iustice
l = Lermite
m = Larove defortune
n = Force
o = Ace de Baton
p = Le Pendu
q = Lamort
r = Lemperance
s = Lediabie
t = La Maison Dieu
u = Ace de Coups
v = Lestoille
w = Lalune
x = Lesoleil
y = Leiugement
z = Lemond

Read fluctuations in hair length among the figures to measure the passing of time in the foretelling of imaginary events. p. 160

This exercise comes from one of my favorite sections in *Tarology, A Cutting-Edge Extension to Our Infallible Method to Fortell the Time of Imaginary Events*. The title alone is full of puns and jests, poking fun at the prognosticatory use of the Tarot while at the same time including a very serious observation about the use of the deck as a pataphysical machine.

In this chapter Enrique introduces an alternate history wherein the Tarot contains a wisdom of the wig, a message concealed within the hair-lengths and styles of the figure cards. This device is associated with a secret society, *la confrérie de la perruque*

or the Brotherhood of the Wig, which was also responsible for spreading the myth that Etteila was a hairdresser.

He states that there is infinite analogical wisdom to be gained from the observation of the growth and manicure of our hair and provides three guidelines for fortune-telling and two astute examples of the metaphorical possibilities of hair.

1. Hairless to hairy (hair growth) suggests an imaginary event at the end of the month.
2. Hairy to hairless (a haircut) suggests an imaginary event at the beginning of the month.
3. No noticeable event suggests an immanent imaginary event.
4. Hairless to hairy can also suggest things "getting hairy"; a bad omen.
5. Hairy to hairless can also suggest things "cleaning up"; a good omen.

In working with this device in my readings I have also adapted it to cover knowledge of specific times of the year. This is done by judging the amount of time it may take for a terminal hair length to be reached. I take this development as evidence of my own induction into the Fraternity without my prior knowledge or consent.

Here is an example from the Dodal:

Will I get an apartment before my baby is due in August?

CHEVALIER•DEBASTON / 9 DE EPEES / ROY•DE•BASTONS

The sequence begins with the rider moving left while turning and swinging right giving the impression of a frantic search. The second depicts the pattern of a battle characterized by being stuck and moving in circles. The final shows the king settling in and affixing his signature to the floor beneath his feet. According to the calculations of la confrérie de la perruque the king should be settled in by August.

Tarologyeast Note: The reading was conducted in May and the hair seemed to suggest about three months of growth.

Create tarot sentences. p 227

One of the last chapters of *Tarology, Com(parable) Language*, beginning on page 226 outlines a simple activity for approaching the reading of a sequence of cards in

reverse order through the composition of "tarot sentences." No examples are provided and the reader is instead challenged to "figure them out yourself."

The basic principles are very simple. Lay out a three card sequence of trumps. With the recognition that each card trumps the previous one, a sentence may be constructed by reading the cards from right to left in accordance with the pattern "object-verb-subject." Emphasis is placed upon the middle card which may produce a verb based upon its semantic, phonetic, or visual value influenced by the context of the surrounding cards.

Here is an example from the Dodal:

LE•FOL / FORCE / LEMONDE

The world opens up to the fool.

•

This is just a small sampling of all of the operations contained therein but it should provide sufficient impetus to be able to approach the text as a practical manual rather than an unusual curiosity. I strongly encourage anyone reading to try the exercises out for yourself (either these or others that you discover in the course of your reading of the book) in order to help develop your creative faculties and unleash the inward streams on inspiration.

Tarologist Games

Compiled by D.M.

Inspired by the similarity to and contiguity with Surrealist Games as expertly catalogued by Alastair Brotchie, I thought it would be useful to highlight some of the practical dimensions of Enrique's writings for those interested in "sabotaging reality through poetic action."

From *Tarology*:

"The word 'Tarology' alludes to the body of practices built around the poetic uses of the tarot as an aleatory device, in the belief that such pursuits can be very illuminating at expanding our repertoire of thoughts about the words we use."

Follow Grasset d'Orcet's gesture of decoding. p. 78

Follow Roussel's gesture of the poet. p.78

Read the gestural language of the trumps. p.84

Turn the trumps' names into images. p. 89

Turn playing cards into a thermometer. p. 130

Reveal a word or phrase by translating a sequence of cards into a word. p. 132

Translate a word into a sequence of cards. p. 135

Look for other words hiding in plain sight within the trumps' names. p. 138

Hold each tarot card at arm's length to overlap reality. p. 147

Translate the Roman numerals contained in a card's name to foretell the time of imaginary events. p. 154

Read fluctuations in hair length among the characters to measure the passing of time in the foretelling of imaginary events. p. 160

Employ the tarot in a non-divination context. p. 204

Use the tarot as a score for daily life. p. 221

Create tarot sentences. p 227

From the *Marseilles Seekers Course*:

"If the Marseilles tarot is the tarot of the image-makers, then it is within the realm of the image makers that I find the answers I am looking for. For example, since I see a tarot reading as an act of visual poetry, it is by studying poetry that I have arrived at an understanding of the tarot."

Find all possible relationships between the feelings evoked by an imaginary card and the imagery of a real card.

Look at three cards and answer predetermined set of questions.

Create a dictionary of synonyms for the Pips.

Pick a random word in the dictionary and read that word as a narrative.

Define a whole idea by assigning specific literal ideas to three or four cards and using them in a sentence.

Look at three cards and ask yourself "What is happening?" and "How does it feel?"

From *Wordcraft*:

"The point of all these games is to experience language happening. The logic of daily life, the logic of prose, can be derailed in a way that has no other aim than this derailment in itself, as if the act of placing our bets were the very thing that could make winning or losing equally irrelevant. This is how wordplay transforms words, and by revealing their ramifications, becomes magical."

Read your own name as a hieroglyph and see what the story in your name is. p. 25

Take a short word and try to expand and/or recreate its definition by reading it as a hieroglyph. p. 25

Say your name aloud and look for homophones. Break it into syllables and see if each one of them spells new words. p. 34

Look around and try to see if you can find/draw objects and images that can spell a message. p. 34

Break apart a word into partial anagrams. p. 41

From *Looking at the Marseilles Tarot*:

Exercises for use with the questions, "What is Happening?" and "How does this feel?"

"The first question concerns the idea of poiesis ... we look at the card with our mind as free as possible of any preconception or symbolic agenda, and ask ourselves, 'What is happening?' This should lead to a more or less objective description of the image ... The second question concerns the idea of anamnesis. By means of analogies, we search our memories for those moments of our life that can be illustrated by the card's image. We ask ourselves, "How does this feel?", but we shouldn't answer with our intellect. We answer with our memory."

Look at the 22 major Arcana, displayed in a single row. p. 15

Look at each one of the 22 major Arcana, one by one. p. 17

Look at the court cards individually, grouped as a family, grouped by peers, and in 'society'. p. 18

Look at the Minor Arcana, grouped from Ace to Ten, in each suit one at a time. p. 18

Look at the four suits together: Deniers, Batons, Epees, Coupes. p. 20

Look at two random cards placed together. p. 22

Look at three random cards placed together. p. 25

From *Imaginary Readings* p. 65:

"The poetry of the mind has to do with eliciting and nurturing the natural tendency of our imagination."

Interpret reality as a dream full of metaphors.

Project imaginary things onto reality without telling anybody.

Start by visualizing small objects until you are able to experience them in full.

From *The Invisible Tarot*: p. 25

"French author Tchalai Unger says that true Tarot divination comes when you are able to leave the cards behind and just find Tarot in life, dressed as an energetic imprint."

Think of everyone who sits with you as your teacher.

Try to see the beauty in that person regardless of their physical appearance.

Aspire to be useful to those who come to you.

enrique enriquez \ˈvɪz-wəl-ˈθɪŋkər\

noun

1: any of various mammals that are usually solitary or sometimes live in pairs and have the young open-eyed and furred at birth

2: a person whose job is to prevent or put an end to leaks of sensitive information

Example:



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